

in the market has continued to be the series *Grand Theft Auto*, a lucrative series developed by Rockstar Games. A player may purchase prostitutes, destroy private property, wreck other people's automobiles, and essentially wreak havoc on the streets of a major city. This has captured the attention of city councils, Congress, and any number of outraged advocacy groups. As portrayed in the game, mimicking and glorifying gang behavior is disruptive and dangerous. Two staff writers for the *Washington Post*, Eric M. Weiss and Jose Antonio Vargas, have pointed out that these games are often sold or rented to children (2005). Although the revenue for game sales may be extraordinary, the social consequences are regarded by some as dire. Psychologist Craig Anderson has published findings asserting that adolescents playing violent video games experience accelerated heart rates and adrenaline rushes that may translate into violent behavior in real life.

Many of the most educational games are offered as PC games and are frequently priced lower than those created exclusively for one of the big three systems. Games such as *Battle Chess* or *Chessmaster* offer tutorials in how to improve one's chess skills. *Colonization* and *Civilization* are examples of intellectually stimulating games that have been offered in the past. Players of these games learn about world history, world leaders, inventions, architecture, the development of civilizations, and how to defeat an opponent by exercising the mind.

Clearly, video games raise awareness of the level of violence and crude sexuality that exist in contemporary society. However, it must not be ignored that these games serve several important purposes. Video games display images that brighten the imaginations of children, many are educational, and the old cliché about hand and eye coordination being sharpened through repeated game play is scientifically valid. When examining and engaging in discourse about societal problems, video games deserve to be discussed in a balanced manner and with the full spectrum of perspectives in order to recognize their positive impact on society as a whole.

**SEE ALSO** *Adolescent Psychology; Cultural Studies; Entertainment Industry; Leisure; Microelectronics Industry; Popular Culture; Sexuality; Sports; Sports Industry; Violence*

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beck, John, and Mitchell Wade. 2006. *The Kids Are Alright: How the Gamer Generation Is Changing the Workplace*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Provenzo, Eugene. 1991. *Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sohn, Emily. 2004. The Violent Side of Video Games. *Science News For Kids*. January 14.

<http://www.sciencenewsforkids.org/articles/20040114/Feature1.asp>.

Weiss, Eric M., and Jose Antonio Vargas. 2005. Video Games' Chaos Echoed in Streets, D.C. Leaders Say. *Washington Post*. February 4, 2005: A-1.

*Jonathan Jacobs*

## VIE

**SEE** *Import Penetration*.

## VIET MINH

**SEE** *Ho Chi Minh*.

## VIETNAM WAR

The Vietnam War has been permanently singled into the American consciousness, and its impact will be felt for years to come in foreign policy debates. The conflict produced four million killed or wounded Vietnamese—one-tenth of the combined population of North and South Vietnam at the onset of the war—and ranks as the United States' longest and costliest overseas conflict, with the loss of 57,939 American lives and \$150 billion in U.S. military spending. Moreover, Vietnam was a critical issue in the foreign policy of six successive U.S. presidential administrations.

#### BACKGROUND

A thorough understanding of the Vietnam War must begin with the end of World War II (1939–1945) and the onset of the cold war. To be sure, Communist Vietnam and the United States had interacted before 1946, notably when Ho Chi Minh requested Vietnamese self-determination at the 1918 Versailles Peace Conference ending World War I (1914–1918) and when he made his 1945 independence speech, which quoted the U.S. Declaration of Independence as a band played the “Star Spangled Banner.” But it was the specter of a strengthened Soviet Union threatening Asia that spurred U.S. involvement in Indochina, the French colonial holdings that comprised present-day Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. In 1945 France had petitioned for the return of Indochina, which it had surrendered to the Japanese earlier in World War II. A year earlier, U.S. president Franklin Roosevelt, a fervent anticolonialist, had written to the British ambassador that he believed “Indochina should not go back to the French,

but that it should be administered by international trusteeship.”

But by the summer of 1950, four years into the French Indochina War, Roosevelt was long dead, Harry Truman had assumed office, and the geopolitical landscape looked remarkably different: the Soviet Union had detonated an atomic bomb, Chinese communists had completed their conquest of the mainland, Senator Joseph McCarthy had initiated his now infamous campaign against “softness” toward communism, and the United States was involved in a full-scale war against a Soviet satellite in Korea. In such a political climate the United States regarded Ho Chi Minh and his organization the *Viet Minh* (the abbreviation for the Vietnam Independence League, formed in 1941) as part of a wider communist threat. The image of France in U.S. policy circles also had evolved with the changing times; the country was no longer a nation of greedy imperialists, but a stalwart opponent of the spread of the “red menace” in Asia. Thus, in much the same spirit as the Berlin airlift (1948–1949) and the postwar provision of monetary assistance to Greece and Turkey, the United States offered financial support to France in its quest for repossession of Vietnam. The allotment in 1950 started at \$10 million, but it rapidly grew to \$1.06 billion by 1954. In fact, a full 80 percent of the French war effort was paid for by the United States.

Despite the substantial U.S. support, the French were unable to prevail, and they eventually withdrew entirely after the battle of Dien Bien Phu in spring 1954. The resounding defeat (13,200 of the 16,000 French soldiers were either killed or captured) drove both sides to the bargaining table (along with, among others, the United States, China, and Soviet Union) at the 1954 Geneva Conference, where an agreement was reached to temporarily partition the country at the seventeenth parallel. A demilitarized zone (DMZ) now divided two governments: the communist North (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam) led by the Viet Minh, and the anticommunist South (the Republic of Vietnam) under the emperor Bao Dai.

The seeds of war were sown in the very language of the Geneva Accords, which called for an election to take place in July 1956 to choose the government of a reunified Vietnam. There was considerable consternation that a Communist government could prevail in a democratic election: Ho Chi Minh had become a popular revolutionary figure throughout Vietnam and, more importantly, no southern leaders had emerged with the charisma to best him in an election. Certainly, few Vietnamese would be willing to support an emperor who owed his very position to French colonialism. A Communist win would pose a setback to Eisenhower’s global strategy of “rolling back” the Communist threat, and U.S. officials warned that the

loss of Vietnam would cause a chain reaction, much like the falling of dominoes, as other Southeast Asian nations succumbed to Communist pressures. Recent scholarship has refuted this “domino theory” by arguing that the United States’ military advantage over the Soviet Union at that time demonstrates that important U.S. policymakers such as Secretary of State John Foster Dulles were less afraid of fending off Communist insurgencies and more interested in projecting U.S. power in the region.

Eventually the United States chose to throw its support behind Ngo Dinh Diem, the prime minister of South Vietnam, who was nominated in 1954 by Emperor Bao Dai in the midst of the Geneva Conference. Although he possessed staunch anticommunist credentials, Diem was handicapped by his Catholicism (a religion shared by only 15% of the country’s population), his residence in the United States during the war against the French (which prevented him from capitalizing on the nationalist fervor), and his lack of many political allies other than his own powerful family. He needed help to build a political base and popular support before he could possibly succeed in an election. The United States was willing to offer that assistance, in part because of Diem’s cultivation of important political figures such as intelligence officer Colonel Edward G. Lansdale, and it began channeling aid through Diem, informing all potential rivals that future assistance hinged on Diem’s position at the helm. The gamble to support Diem until he could consolidate power and institute democratic reforms was the means by which the United States found itself inextricably linked to the southern regime.

#### THE POLICE ACTION

The issue of which side first violated the Geneva Accords will forever remain the fault line dividing historians of the war. Did South Vietnam violate the accords by postponing the elections, claiming (with U.S. support) that free and fair elections could never take place under a Communist government? Or did North Vietnam violate the terms of the accords through its military assistance to Communist guerrillas in the South, the National Liberation Front (NLF)? Although some have claimed that the NLF (also called the *Vietcong*) was always composed of northern agents and controlled by Hanoi, and not an indigenous popular movement of the South, there was no clear political relationship between the northern government and the growing insurgency in the South until northern leaders decided in May 1959 that they needed to take control of the movement.

Whatever the answer, the South found itself embroiled in a deadly conflict with the NLF, which had entrenched itself in the Mekong Delta as early as 1957 and in the central highlands by 1958. Afraid that Diem’s

power might be threatened by the conflict, the United States almost immediately lent him military assistance. The first deaths recorded on the U.S. Vietnam War Memorial are from 1957, but for the most part the U.S. military's role remained minor until May 1959, when U.S. military advisors were placed with South Vietnamese regiments as part of a police action. Although the United States described this move as aiding an anti-Communist ally, North Vietnam interpreted the assistance as a continuation of the Western colonialism begun by the French.

The U.S. commitment to Vietnam expanded under the Kennedy administration at the end of 1961 after a series of incidents (most notably the Bay of Pigs) allowed the Republican opposition to portray him as soft on Communism. Consequently, Kennedy chose to take a hard line against the advance of Communism in Southeast Asia, expanding the number of military advisers from 900 to 3,200 by the end of 1961 and then to 11,300 by the end of 1962. Despite these large increases in advisers and despite optimistic Defense Department reports to the contrary, little progress was being made in quelling the insurgency. Prominent U.S. officials began to blame this failure on Diem, claiming that rampant corruption by his friends and family, lack of progress on land reform, and, above all else, an anti-Buddhist policy, were causing him to lose favor with Vietnamese citizens. Diem's relationship with Buddhists was highlighted by a May 1963 incident in Hue when a deputy provincial chief gave orders to fire on 20,000 Buddhists at a religious celebration. Nine people were killed, and the Buddhist monk Quang Duc was prompted to burn himself a month later, calling for Diem to "show charity and compassion to all religions." Photographs of his self-immolation appeared in U.S. newspapers and were thought to undermine support for the war effort. Small-scale opposition to the war, mainly on U.S. college campuses, erupted not long after the incident.

Putting pressure on Diem, the United States called for South Vietnamese military leaders to act against Diem's excesses. How much the United States knew of the southern military's true plans is a matter of intense debate, but on November 2, 1963, Diem was overthrown in a coup and executed, and General Duong Van Minh (or Big Minh) came to power. (Minh lasted less than two months before another military coup installed Nguyen Khanh.) The overthrow of Diem was followed by an announcement on November 15 that the United States would begin withdrawing 1,000 troops. The withdrawal never happened because a week later Kennedy was assassinated and Vice President Lyndon Johnson assumed the presidency. More optimistic about the potential for U.S. victory, Johnson increased the number of U.S. advisers to 21,000.

## THE ONSET OF WAR

The Gulf of Tonkin incident served as the catalyst to full U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. On August 2, 1964 the USS *Maddox* was conducting a routine reconnaissance mission in the gulf when it was fired on by North Vietnamese coastal defense forces. The *Maddox* easily repelled the attack with air support from the nearby USS *Ticonderoga*, destroying one torpedo boat in the encounter. President Johnson, who was mired in a tough election campaign, chose a firm but restrained response, rejecting reprisals against the North but warning Hanoi that "grave consequences" would result from further unprovoked military attacks. Then, on August 4, the *Maddox* and USS *Turner Joy* picked up radar signals of an apparent torpedo attack from North Vietnamese vessels, and for two hours the ships responded with a torrent of fire against radar targets and took a series of evasive actions. Johnson ordered retaliatory air strikes on North Vietnamese targets and used the event to persuade Congress to pass the August 7 Gulf of Tonkin resolution that authorized the president "to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force."

Recent scholarship has examined whether the North Vietnamese ever actually attacked during the Tonkin incident. *Maddox* captain John J. Herrick conceded that the radar signal may have been nothing more than an "overeager sonar man" who "was hearing the ship's own propeller beat." The National Security Agency admitted to translation errors in intercepted Vietnamese transmissions that were used as grounds for the second attack. Senator William Fulbright confessed that he felt hoodwinked by the information presented in the 40-minute Senate debate. Most importantly, the scholar Gareth Porter in *Perils of Dominance* (2005) claimed that important information that cast doubt on the attack may have been concealed from Lyndon Johnson by Robert McNamara, his own secretary of defense.

Thus began the Vietnam War. The United States convinced Australia and New Zealand to contribute troops and material support, and in March 1965 began a series of bombing raids on North Vietnam known as "Rolling Thunder," with the intention of bringing the Hanoi leadership to the bargaining table. An initial 3,500 ground troops were designated for combat rather than advisory duty in Vietnam; through incremental escalation, the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam grew to 184,000 by the end of 1965 and to 429,000 by the end of 1966.

As the United States geared up for war, young Americans sensed that there would be a return to the draft lottery. The National Committee to the End the War in Vietnam staged the first burning of a draft card in the United States in October 1965. After the Tonkin incident there was also turmoil in South Vietnam, where Nguyen

Khanh tried to exploit the new situation with a series of repressive decrees that led to riots in the street and a series of plots and counterplots until Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky grabbed power in the spring of 1965.

North Vietnam attempted to match the U.S. escalation with incursions by its regular army into the central highlands, but a setback with the battle of Ia Drang Valley in November 1965 curtailed the use of their regular army in favor of guerrilla tactics. Even so, at Ia Drang 240 Americans were killed and 450 wounded, sending a shocking signal to the United States that the war would not be won easily or on the cheap.

Most U.S./South Vietnam military activity after Ia Drang focused on three areas. First, search and destroy missions, a favorite of General Westmoreland, the head of U.S. forces in the country, were part of his attrition strategy to kill and capture Vietcong forces in the South. Second, “pacification” was the securing of the South Vietnamese countryside by means of a combination of military protection and development assistance. Finally, efforts were made to cut the Vietcong’s supply line that came down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a dense network of forest paths running through Laos into South Vietnam. Although the CIA began to pick up evidence of enemy activity along the trail as early as 1959, the route was of limited value to the North until 1963, when at the behest of Colonel Bui Tin it was expanded to accommodate trucks and large movements of North Vietnamese regulars. The original intention of Rolling Thunder was to disrupt traffic on the trail, but the bombing raids did not have the desired effect because the North Vietnamese showed remarkable ingenuity in repairing damaged roads and bridges. Moreover, the United States’ use of toxic chemical defoliants such as napalm and Agent Orange along the trail and in other areas to cut back the dense brush and expose Northern forces had devastating effects on Vietnamese civilians; news of this bolstered the antiwar movement in the United States, and protesters and police clashed violently at the University of Wisconsin in October 1967.

The United States attempted again to disrupt the supply network in January 1968 by setting up a fire base along the Laotian border near the town of Khe Sanh. The U.S. marines at the base soon found themselves under heavy attack from North Vietnamese regulars. Only in April did the siege finally end, after an incessant barrage of U.S. artillery and air strikes equivalent to five Hiroshima-sized atomic bombs. Khe Sanh served to distract U.S. attention from North Vietnam’s preparations for its largest and best coordinated operation of the war, lasting from January 1968 to July 1969. Known as the Tet Offensive because it occurred during the *Tet Nguyen Dan* (the Vietnamese name for the Chinese New Year), the operation had North

Vietnamese troops driving to the center of South Vietnam’s seven largest cities and attacking thirty provincial capitals from the deep South to the DMZ. The goal of the attacks was to ignite a popular uprising that would result in the overthrow of the South Vietnamese government and withdrawal of U.S. forces. In the first days of the offensive several cities were overrun and a nineteen-man suicide squad managed to seize the U.S. embassy in Saigon for six hours before they were routed. In most areas the U.S. and South Vietnamese forces repulsed the attacks immediately, but in Saigon the fighting lasted almost a week and in Hue bloody house-to-house combat consumed the two sides for over a month. Eventually, Hue was recovered, and Westmoreland declared that allied forces had killed more enemy troops in the last seven days of fighting than the United States had lost since the beginning of the war.

Although North Vietnam’s military objectives had not been achieved in the Tet Offensive, the psychological impact on the American home front was considerable. Many U.S. citizens who had supported the war were shocked by the ferocity of the attack and concluded that the government was misleading them. Members of Johnson’s own cabinet began to turn against the war and resisted calls for more troops. Soon Westmoreland was replaced in Vietnam by Creighton Adams, and that same year, 1968, Johnson announced an “October surprise”—a complete cessation of all air, naval, and artillery bombardment of North Vietnam north of the twentieth parallel as a symbolic gesture to encourage the peace talks taking place in Paris. The Paris talks broke down eventually, as did Johnson’s fortitude. He chose not to run for president in the 1968 election, which was marred by intense antiwar protests at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, and eventually won by the Republican candidate Richard Nixon, in part because of his “secret plan” to remove the United States from the war with honor.

#### THE WIND DOWN

Nixon’s secret plan rested on two pillars. First, “Vietnamization” consisted of the gradual strengthening of the South Vietnamese military until they could hold their own against the NLF and North Vietnamese Army. It was hoped that reducing the combat load of U.S. troops would lessen popular opposition to the war stateside. Second, Nixon’s foreign policy of rapprochement with both China and the Soviet Union, in the midst of the Sino-Soviet split, had the effect of limiting their assistance to North Vietnam.

The diplomatic success was undermined by the negative publicity surrounding two notorious events: the 1968 My Lai massacre, which occurred when a platoon led by William Calley killed several hundred Vietnamese women and children and burned a small town to the

ground; and the bombing of Cambodia in 1969, which was intended to destroy NLF sanctuaries and supplies hidden along the Cambodian border. The latter action prompted more protests on U.S. college campuses—four students were shot and killed by National Guard troops during demonstrations at Kent State University in Ohio. On the warfront, one unintended effect of the bombing campaign was to push Communist forces deeper into Cambodia, which destabilized the country and in turn may have encouraged the rise of the Khmer Rouge, who seized power in 1975.

In an effort to help assuage opposition to the war, Nixon announced on October 12, 1970 that the United States would withdraw 40,000 more troops before Christmas. But on October 30th, the worst monsoon to hit Vietnam in six years caused large floods, killed close to 300, left 200,000 Vietnamese homeless, and brought the war effort to a standstill. On January 15, 1973, citing progress in peace negotiations, President Nixon suspended offensive operations in North Vietnam, then followed with a unilateral withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam. The Paris Peace Accords were signed on January 27, 1973, officially ending U.S. involvement in the Vietnam conflict. For their efforts, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and North Vietnamese lead negotiator Le Duc Tho were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. But the fighting in Vietnam continued unabated. In December 1974 the U.S. Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act of 1974, thereby cutting off all military funding to the Saigon government and rendering the peace terms negotiated by Kissinger unenforceable. By 1975 the South Vietnamese army stood alone against the powerful North Vietnamese, and Saigon famously fell on April 30, 1975 when two tanks crashed through the gates of the presidential palace as South Vietnamese who had cooperated with the United States desperately tried to flee the country.

#### THE AFTERMATH

Vietnam became a unified nation after the war, but at a great cost in terms of human lives and infrastructure, and in 1975 it was one of the world's poorest countries. Although the population still suffers effects of Agent Orange and unexploded ordinance, economic reform (*Doi Moi*) begun in 1986 has drastically reduced poverty from over 70 percent of the population to less than 20 percent and spurred impressive long-term growth throughout the nation. Foreign investment also has played a major role in Vietnam's economic upturn, with an increasing amount coming from the United States after the normalization of relations in 1995. For South Vietnamese connected with the former regime, the end of the war was a time of fear and resentment. Many highly skilled and educated South Vietnamese fled the country at the fall of Saigon and for

years after, severely depleting the nation's human capital. The new Communist government promptly sent connected South Vietnamese to hard-labor camps for "reeducation," many for several years. Persecution and poverty prompted an additional two million people to flee Vietnam as "boat people" over the fifteen years following unification. To deal with the severe refugee crisis in the 1980s and 1990s, the United Nations established refugee camps in neighboring countries to process them. Many of these refugees resettled in the United States, forming large Vietnamese American emigrant communities with a decidedly anticommunist viewpoint.

In the United States the war had profound psychological effects, dividing the American public over the contentious issues of the humiliating withdrawal, perceived inequities in the draft, the schism in society created by the antiwar movement, knowledge of the devastation wrought on an impoverished country, and, most importantly, a profound sense of distrust in government, as many Americans believed their elected officials had not been forthcoming about the difficulties of the encounter while young citizens died in unprecedented numbers. Civil military relations were damaged because many soldiers and officers believed a winnable war had been undermined by civilian leadership and politics, and politicians felt that a runaway military had supplied it with misleading reports about the success of operations (particularly pacification). Finally, the role of the media was forever altered by reporters, photographers, and television crews who delivered coverage of the war into American living rooms. Some would hold the media up as heroic truth-tellers; others would blame it for supplying fodder to unpatriotic war protesters.

**SEE ALSO** *Anticolonial Movements; Bay of Pigs; Communism; Coup d'Etat; Domino Theory; Guerrilla Warfare; Imperialism; Johnson, Lyndon B.; Kennedy, John F.; Khrushchev, Nikita; Minh, Ho Chi; Peace; Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bowman, John S. 2005. *The Vietnam War Almanac*. New York: Barnes and Noble.
- Economist*. 2005. Vietnam: Changing Gear. November 26: 49–50.
- Ely, John Hart. 1993. *War and Responsibility: Constitutional Lessons of Vietnam and Its Aftermath*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Herring, George C. 1996. *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Levy, David W. 1995. *The Debate over Vietnam*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Marr, David G. 1945. *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Miguel, Edward, and Gerard Roland. 2005. The Long Run Impact of Bombing Vietnam. National Bureau of Economic Research working paper no. 11954. Washington, DC.
- Porter, Gareth. 2005. *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Scott, Shane. 2005. Vietnam War Intelligence “‘Deliberately Skewed,’” Secret Study Says. *New York Times*, December 2.
- Van Arkadie, Brian, and Raymond Mallon. 2003. *Vietnam: A Transition Tiger?* Canberra: Asia Pacific Press at Australia National University.

Edmund J. Malesky

## VILLA, FRANCISCO (PANCHO)

1878–1923

The memory of Francisco (Pancho) Villa evokes contradicting sentiments. Villa has been extolled as a trustworthy revolutionary. He has also been vilified as a cruel, dishonest bandit. Nevertheless, Villa remains a significant figure in Mexican history. His memory remains alive through Mexican ballads known as *corridos*, poetry, and film. This article examines the life of Villa—the bandit and the revolutionary—and his contributions to Mexican political history.

Villa was born José Doroteo Arango Arámbula on June 5, 1878, in the northern state of Durango. (In *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*, Friedrich Katz states that baptism records show he was baptized as Doroteo Arango, while Francisco Caudet Yarza claims in *Pancho Villa* that he was baptized as José Doroteo.) Villa came from a poor background. His parents, Agustín Arango and Micaele Arambula, worked as sharecroppers on one of the largest haciendas in Durango. Villa's father died when Villa was young. Consequently, Villa, the oldest of five children, had to work to support the family at the expense of a formal education.

Villa was a bandit by the 1890s. The reason he decided to live the harsh life of a bandit in the mountains of Durango is unknown. In his memoirs Villa recounts that he fled into the mountains of Durango when he was sixteen years old out of fear that he would be incarcerated for shooting and injuring Agustín López Negrete, the owner of the hacienda on which he lived and worked (Katz 1998, p. 3). Villa allegedly shot the owner to protect the honor of one of his younger sisters.

However, some biographers question whether or not Villa's attack on the hacienda owner actually took place (Braddy 1948, p. 349; Garfias, 1985, p. 15; Katz 1998,

p. 65). Celia Herrera, whose relatives had been killed by Villa, recorded that he became a bandit upon murdering a friend during an altercation (Katz 1998, p. 6). Regardless of its validity, the incident remains a part of Villa's story.

Doroteo changed his name to Francisco, or Pancho, Villa as an outlaw. The new name was probably an adoption of the name of his biological grandfather, Jesús Villa, and changed to evade the federal army and state authorities in Durango. Legendary tales impart that Villa adopted the name of a famous bandit, Francisco Villa, who died after being severely injured during an attack by local citizens in the mountains of Durango.

The description of Villa's life during this time has varied. Some individuals viewed him solely as a violent, ruthless bandit. Celia Herrera's *Francisco Villa ante la historia* describes Villa as one who led a life of crime and vengeance in which he killed friends, beat women, and tortured those who refused to cooperate when he demanded their money (Katz 1998, p. 6). Villa admitted to killing many men in his memoirs but denied being a cold-blooded murderer. Rather, the men were killed in self-defense or out of retaliation for betrayal (Katz 1998, p. 5).

On the other hand, Villa has been perceived as a benevolent champion of the poor. His memoirs reveal that he had stolen money and given it to the poor, including family members. These altruistic acts earned him the label of “Robin Hood of the Mexicans” (Brandt 1964, p. 153; Caudet 1998, p. 35; Katz 1998, p. 7).

By 1910 Villa had transformed from a bandit into a revolutionary. Abraham González, the leader of the Anti-Reelectionist Party in Chihuahua, recruited Villa and a military leader, Pascual Orozco, into the revolutionary movement against President Porfirio Díaz (Katz 1998, p. 73). González's decision to recruit an outlaw to support the revolutionary efforts of Francisco Madero remains questionable. Regardless, the revolution was successful. President Díaz was forced to resign after thirty years of dictatorial rule, and Madero became the president of Mexico. Villa earned a promotion to honorary general, and he fought against the counterrevolutionaries, led by Orozco, in 1912.

Villa was also an important figure in U.S.-Mexican relations. His relationship with the United States was initially amicable. The United States allowed arms to be smuggled to Villa in January 1914, and President Woodrow Wilson ended the U.S. arms embargo against Mexico shortly thereafter, which allowed Villa to buy ammunition legally from the United States (Katz 1998, p. 250). President Wilson even offered Villa political asylum in the United States in 1915 (Katz 1998, p. 535). These actions illustrated the United States' confidence in Villa's abilities as a leader.