



*Raising Heirs to the Throne in
Nineteenth Century Spain:
The Education of the
Constitutional Monarch*

Richard Meyer Forsting

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During the nineteenth century, Spain experienced a period of decline. The country was ravaged by the Peninsular War (1807-1814) then experienced a series of economic and political crises. The century came to an end with the loss of Spain's last overseas possessions in the Caribbean and Pacific regions during the Spanish-American War (1898). During this period, Spain appeared to focus almost exclusively on its own domestic concerns compared to the degree of engagement with the wider world that took place in previous centuries. As a result, Spain often receives little attention in wider histories of nineteenth-century Europe. In *Raising Heirs to the Throne in Nineteenth Century Spain*, Richard Meyer Forsting shows how popular debates concerning the education of the heir to the throne in a constitutional monarchy demonstrate that Spain had not turned inward but continued to engage with the wider intellectual currents of nineteenth-century Europe. Forsting connects the educations of three nineteenth-century Spanish monarchs, Isabel II (r. 1833-1868), Alfonso XII (r. 1874-1885) and Alfonso XIII (r. 1886-1931) to the wider political and cultural trends of the era.

The introduction of a constitutional monarchy combined with the breakdown of the Spanish monarch's traditional sources of power and legitimacy resulted in increased scrutiny of the education of heirs to the throne. Military, classical, and religious traditions connected with Spanish royal childhood for centuries encountered new nineteenth-century liberal conceptions of education "as a tool for bringing about long-term social and political change" (16). These new ideas brought secular education in conflict with the Catholic Church, which was determined to maintain its own curriculum without outside management from the government, and this conflict affected royal education as well as available schooling for the wider population. The expansion of the popular press facilitated wider debates concerning the best methods for educating the monarch, drawing upon European models. Although literacy rates in Spain were comparatively low by the end of the nineteenth century (45% in 1900, compared to 89% in the USA or 83% in France) (166), there was a widespread view that the education of the heir to the throne was a decisive factor in the future of Spain. The press compared Spanish royal children to the heirs of other European countries and discussed transnational ideas concerning the ideal education for the heir to the throne. Forsting examines three key themes regarding the educations of Isabel II, Alfonso XII and Alfonso XIII: the degree to which each monarch was

trained for their future political role, the involvement of the military in their education, and debates concerning royal education in the press. Through this thematic structure, Forsting expands his analysis of the education of individual rulers from the biographical context to the wider political and cultural development of nineteenth-century Spain.

The comparisons of the education of Isabel II with Alfonso XII and Alfonso XIII not only demonstrate change and continuity in debates concerning royal education over the course of the nineteenth century, but also a comparison of attitudes toward the education of male and female sovereigns. The educational programmes drawn up for Isabel reflect the tension between the focus on domestic accomplishments expected in the education of an elite young woman of the period and the classical education expected for a future sovereign. Isabel II was a contemporary of Queen Victoria and the two sovereigns faced similar challenges regarding reconciling nineteenth-century gender roles with their respective positions as constitutional monarchs. While the education of the future Queen Victoria was left to her mother, the Duchess of Kent, Isabel II's mother Maria Christina of the Two Sicilies went into exile in 1841 and Isabel's educational programme was considered a matter of state. One of Isabel's early tutors, Don Juan Vincente Ventosa, who had previously taught Spanish to the children of King Louis Philippe of France, argued that the young Queen should receive "a more boyish education, adequate for the pupil's position and the necessities of the people" (48), but the overwhelming consensus was that Isabel could focus on painting, dancing, and other feminine accomplishments because her future husband would assume a leadership role in both the marriage and affairs of state.

For Isabel II's son Alfonso XII and grandson Alfonso XIII, military education was a key aspect of their training in an effort to cement the relationship between the monarchy and the military during tumultuous times. The relationship of each monarch with the military became a key element of the royal public image. At the age of five, the future Alfonso XII "was formally enrolled as a volunteer in the Regimiento infantería inmemorial del Rey no.1" (118) and his early tutors included military officers. Training in swordsmanship and horsemanship was central to his education and he began to participate in military reviews at the age of fourteen. He completed his military education at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in the United Kingdom. Despite the military defeats suffered by Spain during the Spanish-American War, Alfonso XIII's education and public image was also closely associated with the military and he presented himself as a soldier king. From a young age "Alfonso XIII was, much like his father, portrayed almost exclusively in military uniform" (132). The involvement of military officers in

the education of the heir to the throne was a constant theme over the course of the nineteenth century.

Raising Heirs to the Throne in Nineteenth Century Spain is closely focused on the events of the nineteenth century and it would have been interesting to read the author's analysis of the long-term consequences of the precedents set by the education of Isabel II, Alfonso XII, and Alfonso XIII. Alfonso XII was the first future King of Spain to be educated in private schools rather than exclusively inside a palace. Different generations of the Spanish royal family continue to introduce new innovations concerning the education of royal children. The future King Juan Carlos attended boarding school at a young age and was separated from his family for long periods of time. In contrast, his son, King Felipe VI, was educated close to home until he studied abroad at Lakefield College near Peterborough, Canada, during his secondary education. The close relationship between the monarch and military was crucial after the constitutional monarchy was reintroduced in 1978 and the new King Juan Carlos helped to prevent a 1981 coup d'état by expressing support for the new democratic government in the uniform of the Captain General of the Spanish armed forces. The history of female succession in Spain has once again received attention in Spain as Felipe VI's heir is his elder daughter Leonor, Princess of Asturias. The question of how best to educate a constitutional monarch remains a matter of discussion and debate in twenty-first century Spain.

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