

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MEXICO

The Classic Period to the Present



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Chapter

1

The Maya

There were many **indigenous** tribes that lived in what is now present-day Mexico. Roughly twenty million people inhabited an area historians refer to as **Mesoamerica**.¹ One of the most famous of these tribes were the Mayan who dominated Mexico from 250-900 AD. The time period of Mayan dominance is known as the **Classic Period**. The Mayan empire was connected by trade routes, with each city having its own palaces, pyramids, temples, canals, plazas, and even ball courts.

The Mayan Creation Myth

The Mayans cultivated many crops such as beans and squash. However, the most important crop to the Maya was **maize**. They grew their crops in raised fields called a **milpa**. According to the Mayan myth, the **Popol Vuh** (think of it as the Mayan version of the Adam and Eve story), three plumed water-dwelling serpents attempted three times to create humans. The first time the serpents used mud, but the humans could neither move nor speak. The serpents tried again using wood, but the humans had no soul or blood. Finally, the serpents decided to use maize, resulting in the creation of the Maya people. Clearly, one can see just how strong of an attachment the Mayans had to maize.²

Ollama

The ancient Mayans also enjoyed recreational activities such as sports. However, the game they played was not like any sport known today. The Mayans played **ollama**. The game was played on a court that was shaped like the letter “I.” Along each of the long sides of the court was a wall with a stone ring. The rings varied in size from 50 cm to 10 cm.³ Two teams played at a time. The object of the game was to keep the seven-to-eight-inch solid rubber ball away from the other team, and, if possible, get the ball through one of the rings. The game sometimes had different rules depending on the location of where it was being played in Mesoamerica. Scoring was extremely difficult because the rings were

¹ Alicia Hernández Chavez, *Mexico: A Brief History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 1.

² Jürgen Buchenau, *Mexican Mosaic: A Brief History of Mexico* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2008), 11.

³ Ted J.J. Leyenaar, “‘Ulama,’ the Survival of the Mesoamerican Ballgame Ullamalitzli,” *Kiva* 58, no. 2 (1992): 119.

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small and high, and players could only use their hips (among the Maya, the chest could also be used)⁴ to hit the ball. Players wore padding because the ball could kill a person if it hit them hard enough. Large sums of money were often wagered on the outcome of the games. However, ollama was more than a mere game. It was a sacred ritual designed to imitate the movement of the planets and stars. The game was quite serious. The losing captain was sometimes sacrificed or the losers became the slaves of the victors.⁵

Mayan Civilization

Social Hierarchy

At the very top of the Mayan social hierarchy was the upper class, or the nobility, which the Maya called the *cabualob*.⁶ The king was in charge of everything. The Maya believed their kings were related to the gods. Under the king was the rest of the *cabualob* which included high priests, rich merchants, and noble warriors. This was the group that held the power in Mayan society and lived in the cities in the most luxurious chambers of the palace compounds near the major avenues. The *cabualob* had access to ball courts, steam baths, and the *causeways*.⁷

There was a very small Mayan middle class. This group consisted of artisans who specialized in craft production, petty officials, soldiers, and small merchants. This group lived outside the core of the city in something similar to apartment complexes today.⁸

At the very bottom of the social hierarchy was the lower class. This group was composed of laborers and farmers. The lower class lived even further from the core of the city in thatched-roof huts. They farmed, hunted, and fished.⁹

The middle and the lower classes had to pay *tribute* to the upper class. These people were responsible for producing the luxury items enjoyed by the nobility as well as the basic staples of maize, beans, and vegetables that sustained the entire society.¹⁰ The amount of tribute one had to pay was based on agricultural *surpluses* and how many luxury goods were available.¹¹ The lower classes also served as the empire's public works crew and as soldiers in time of war. Mayan society, for the most part, was a *fixed society*, which meant that one could not move up or down a social class.¹²

⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵ Michael C. Meyer, William L. Sherman, and Susan M. Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 19-20.

⁶ Chavez, 21.

⁷ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹¹ Chavez, 21.

¹² Buchenau, 11.

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Religion

The Mayan religion was based around the belief that all things—gods, people, animals, plants, mountains, and even cities—were alive and that their movements could be timed to account for all of life's events. This was why the Maya had such a great knowledge of astronomy and mathematics and were able to create such a precise calendar.¹³ The Maya also believed that human events were divinely **predetermined**.¹⁴

The Mayan world had three levels: heaven, earth, and the underworld. All three were closely related and shared a divine origin. Mayans existed in the earthly dimension and this dimension was considered sacred. A tree became the symbol of the Mayan's world because it stretched in all three directions. The trunk stood on the earth, its roots went into the underworld, and its branches extended to reach heaven.¹⁵

The Mayan practiced rituals to appease many gods such as the creator god, sun god, moon god, and maize god. These rituals often involved the shedding of human or animal blood, as it was believed that blood was life.¹⁶ Thus, the Mayans did practice human sacrifice. Warfare was important as captured warriors were often the ones sacrificed.¹⁷

Other Achievements

The Maya created many things still used to this very day. The Mayans created a calendar that contained 365 days. Today, their calendar is off by less than a minute after thousands of years.¹⁸ The Mayan calendar served to regulate ritual behavior, defended the Mayans from bad times, and instructed them on how to enjoy times of prosperity.¹⁹ They also created a number system based on the concept of zero and even recorded their history with dates.

The Decline of the Mayans

The reign of the Maya did not last forever. Their empire began to weaken around 900 A.D.. Historians were not really sure why, but there are several theories. Some said there was too much of a burden on the lower class. Others suggested warfare, famine, drought, plague, and maybe even a massive hurricane that led to their decline.²⁰

¹³ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 11-12.

¹⁴ Chávez, 14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁶ Buchenau, 11.

¹⁷ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 13.

¹⁸ Buchenau, 11.


¹⁹ Chávez, 22.


²⁰ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 14, 16, 27, 43.

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The Aztecs

The Aztecs were considered the upstarts of the Mesoamerican world as they were one of the last **nomadic** groups to arrive in Mexico.²¹ Along their long migration from what would either be present day Oklahoma or Texas,²² the Aztecs began to believe that they were a messianic people, the chosen people of the gods.²³ They dominated Mexico from the 13th to the 16th centuries.

The Upstarts

Upon their arrival in Mexico, the Aztecs soon developed a reputation as excellent warriors.²⁴ However, though they were admired for their bravery they were also hated for their cruelty and thus local towns began to hire them as **mercenaries**.²⁵ Legend has it that a leader from another tribe, whose name was Coxcox (meaning pheasant) hired the Aztecs as mercenaries. The Aztecs did not let Coxcox down and they crushed his enemies. The Aztecs presented Coxcox with a gift of 8,000 ears sliced from the heads of his enemies. In return, the Aztecs asked for Coxcox's daughter, Culhùà, who would be made the Aztec queen and treated like a goddess. However, the Aztecs sacrificed Culhùà. Coxcox was outraged and raised an army which scattered the Aztecs.²⁶

Tenochtitlàn

The Aztecs eventually settled in the marshy edges of **Lake Texcoco**. The Aztecs chose this location because an omen appeared consisting of an eagle perched on a cactus with a serpent in its beak. This image became the Mexican coat of arms and now appears on the Mexican flag. This place became known as **Tenochtitlàn**.²⁷

²¹ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 45.

²² Jurgen Buchenau, *Mexican Mosaic: A Brief History of Mexico* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2008), 12.

²³ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁵ Buchenau, 12.

²⁶ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 46.

²⁷ Buchenau, 12.

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No one bothered the Aztecs on this piece of land because most people did not think it was a good place to live. It turned out to be full of waterfowl, fish, and was located at an intersection where three kingdoms met.²⁸

Tenochtitlàn would grow to include between 150,000-200,000 residents, making it one of the largest cities in the world at that time.²⁹ It was a very clean city with a drainage system, and the garbage was hauled away on barges. A crew of a 1,000 men swept and washed the public streets. Residents even bathed more than once a day. Thus, the Aztec people were a healthy group.³⁰ Eventually their empire would grow, through both warfare and trade, to include hundreds of city-states that were interconnected and paid tribute to the Aztecs.³¹

The Aztec Social Hierarchy

Nobility (Pipiltin)

At the top of the Aztec social hierarchy was the Emperor and the royal family, as well as High Priests, military officials, judges, and tax collectors. The Emperor could have many wives. For example, legend has it that the Emperor Nezahualpilli had 2,000 wives. However, each Emperor had one principal or “legitimate” wife. The Emperor and royal family served as examples for the other Aztecs. It was important that the nobility maintain dignity. Perhaps most importantly, the royal family led the Aztec warriors. Unlike most monarchies, the Aztec code of conduct allowed for the best successor to the Emperor to be chosen as the new leader. The Aztecs did not follow the common tradition that the eldest son takes the throne.³²

High Status (not nobility)

Just below the pipiltin was a group of Aztecs that achieved high status in the social order but were not quite nobility. This group included Pochteca (traders/merchants), priests, scholars, artists and scribes.³³

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 68.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

³² Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 58.

³³ *Ibid.*, 59.

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Commoners (macehualtin)

The largest class was the macehualtin. In Aztec society, this group accounted for roughly 90% of the population. They included farmers, laborers, craftsmen, servants, and vendors.³⁴

Slaves

At the very bottom of Aztec society were the slaves. Slaves did have some basic rights and their bondage was not hereditary. Slaves could even marry a free person. Gamblers could bet their freedom in a wager.³⁵

Warfare and Education

Everyone in Aztec society was expected to bear arms. Unlike the Mayan society which was a fixed society, the Aztecs had social mobility based on distinction in battle. The ultimate goal was to become a member of the elite Eagle or Jaguar Knights.³⁶

Both Aztec boys and Aztec girls received an education. Boys learned the art of war and girls learned how to take care of the home and to be good mothers. The upper classes went to schools called calmècac and the lower classes attended schools called telpochcallis.³⁷

Aztec Religion

Beliefs and gods

Like the Maya, the Aztecs worshipped many gods. These gods included the likes of Tlàloc, Tezcatlipoca, and Quetzalcòatl (the most common god in Mesoamerica). However, the predominant god for the Aztecs was Huitzilopochtli.³⁸ Huitzilopochtli (Hummingbird on the Left) was the god of war and sun and was the Aztec supreme deity. According to the Aztecs, after his sister had killed their mother, he in turn killed his sister and proceeded to eat his mother's heart.³⁹

The Aztecs believed that the sun and earth had been destroyed and recreated four times, and that they were currently living in the age of the fifth sun. Based on this belief, they felt that the destruction of the earth and sun in their own time was looming. Obviously, they wanted to avoid the end of the world for as

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁸ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds), 57.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

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long as possible, and the Aztecs believed that special intervention on the part of Huitzilopochtli would help prevent the end of the fifth sun.⁴⁰

Human Sacrifice

Aztec religion also focused around the idea of the natural cycle. Because the sun and the rain fed plant and human life, the Aztecs thus believed that humans should give nourishment to the sun and rain gods. The Aztecs believed that the hearts of the victims they sacrificed nourished the gods and, in particular, the sun.⁴¹ This was why human sacrifice became so important to the Aztecs. If the gods had sacrificed themselves to the sun, how could the Aztecs decline the gods the same honor? Thus, the greatest offering or expression of faith was the giving of life itself. The need for blood also served Aztec military expansion since captives could be sacrificed.⁴²

For the Aztecs, human sacrifice was a solemn, necessary, religious ceremony that was practiced in the hopes of avoiding disaster. "Victims were sent as messengers to the gods to demonstrate the [admiration] of the people, and it was often considered an honor to make the trip."⁴³ There were many ways that the Aztecs sacrificed their victims, but the most common was by the excision [cutting out the heart] of the heart usually followed by decapitation.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴¹ Michel Graulich, "Aztec Human Sacrifice as Expiation," *History of Religions* 39, no. 4 (May 2000): 352.

⁴² Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 54-55.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 55.


⁴⁴ Graulich, 353-354.


Section 3: The Conquest

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The Conquest

The Aztec empire, like all empires, eventually came to an end. Unlike the Mayan Classic Period where historians were still unsure of why Mayan dominance declined, historians can point to the one event that was the beginning of the end for the Aztecs-the arrival of **Fernando Cortès** and the **Conquistadors** from Spain.

Cortès Sets Sail

On February 18, **1519** Cortès embarked from Cuba on an expedition that would change history. Sailing on 11 ships, Cortès commanded roughly 550 men much like himself, ready to gamble on the adventure that lay ahead. Accompanying the men were 16 horses and some small cannon.⁴⁵ The conquistadors sought power and wealth and were not entirely of Spanish ethnicity. Cortès' force was comprised of people from Portugal, Germany, and Italy.⁴⁶

Cortès Arrives

Upon arrival, Cortès had some early conflicts with the indigenous tribes. He lost some men in his first conflict, but he killed over 200 hundred Indians and soon the rumor was spreading that the Spaniards were invincible.⁴⁷ The Spaniards had guns and gunpowder, horses, and huge dogs...things the Indians had never seen before. Horses were described as beasts that snorted and bellowed, sweated, and whose muzzles foamed.⁴⁸

Cortès had one more advantage. He would soon be able to understand the Aztec language. He made contact with **Jerònimo de Aguilar**, who had shipwrecked on the beaches of Mexico in 1511. Aguilar spoke Mayan and Spanish. Cortès was also given a maiden in one of his battles who was baptized **Doña Marina** (She was called **Malinche** by the Indians as she was considered a traitor). She became Cortès' interpreter and advisor. She would communicate with the Indians and pass the message to Aguilar who would pass it to Cortès.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds 80.

⁴⁶ Jurgen Buchenau, *Mexican Mosaic: A Brief History of Mexico* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2008), 18.

⁴⁷ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 80.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 80-83.

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Moctezuma II

Moctezuma II was the emperor of the Aztecs at the time of Cortès' arrival to Mexico. He would decide how to deal with these foreigners.

Moctezuma's Dilemma

Moctezuma was confused and fearful as to the best way to treat the conquistadors. He was unsure who they were, or what they could be. They appeared to be some kind of invincible gods. Hearing of Cortès' arrival, Moctezuma sent gifts to Cortès and then asked him to go back where he came from.⁵⁰ As Moctezuma heard more and more about the strangers, he first ordered his magicians and warlocks to send an evil wind towards the conquistadors. He called for more human sacrifices. When both of these strategies failed, he ordered his people to give the Spanish whatever they wanted. However, Moctezuma had still not ruled out the use of force.⁵¹

Moctezuma's Decision

In the end, Moctezuma made the fateful decision to meet Cortès and invited him into his city.⁵² Cortès told Moctezuma that the conquistadors suffered from “disease of the heart that [could] only be cured with gold.”⁵³ (The Spaniards never did find the mythical **El Dorado**).⁵⁴ Moctezuma made the Spaniards special guests and treated them like gods. The Spaniards were free to roam the city. They admired the palaces and were fascinated by the zoo, but were disgusted by the great rack covered with human skulls.⁵⁵ However, Cortès realized that they were indeed trapped if Moctezuma dared to make the move. Thus, Cortès made a bold decision—he seized Moctezuma as a hostage. For a while, the Aztecs half-heartedly dealt with Cortès. Moctezuma told his people that he was staying with the Spanish not because he was a prisoner, but because it was the will of the gods. However, after about six months, the Aztec population had enough of the conquistadors and began to talk of attacking the Spanish.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Chavez, 32.

⁵¹ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 85.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵³ Buchenau, 20.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁵ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 88.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

Violence Erupts

Pedro de Alvarado

As tension was mounting between the conquistadors and the Aztecs, Cortès was unfortunately called away to deal with a Spanish rival that had just arrived on Mexican soil. Cortès left **Pedro de Alvarado** in charge of a detachment of troops in the Aztec capital. While Cortès was away the Aztecs held a festival. Alvarado got nervous and thought this festival was a threat to the Spanish. He ordered his troops to attack the Aztec aristocracy and some of the Aztecs best warriors and had them killed.⁵⁷ It was said that “the blood of the chiefs ran like water.”⁵⁸

War now existed between the conquistadors and the Aztecs. Hearing that violence had erupted while he was away, Cortès hurried back to Tenochtitlàn. The Aztecs allowed Cortès and his men to re-enter the city. This was all part of their plan to trap the Spanish inside of Tenochtitlàn. The Spanish preferred to do their fighting in open spaces where they could use their horses and guns to their advantage. Now, they were penned in and forced to fight in the streets as the Aztecs hid behind buildings. Cortès urged Moctezuma to get the Aztecs to stop the attack. Moctezuma climbed the rooftops to speak to his fellow Aztecs but he was struck down and killed three days later. Some say he was stoned by his own people while others say he was stabbed or strangled to death on the orders of Cortès.⁵⁹

Noche Triste

Cortès realized he must leave the city, but the Aztecs destroyed all of the bridges and cut off their escape. The conquistadors built a portable bridge and divided the treasure they had plundered from the Aztecs. Their plan was to sneak out at night. Stealth was so important that the conquistadors even wrapped their horses' hooves in cloth so they wouldn't make any noise. They made their move on July 1, 1520, Noche Triste, or “Night of Sorrow.” An old Aztec woman gathering water spotted the Spanish as they attempted their escape and sounded the alarm. Aztec warriors came running and Cortès placed Alvarado in charge of the rear guard to help cover the escape. The Spanish got across the first channel but their bridge broke while passing the second channel and Cortès and others were forced to swim to safety. As Cortès reached shore he assessed the damage of his escape. He had lost 450 men, 4,000 Indian allies, and 46 horses. It was said that Cortès was so upset by the disaster he sat under a tree and cried.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵⁸ Buchenau, 20.

⁵⁹ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 91.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

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Cortès Returns

Cortès would eventually regroup and returned with tens of thousands of Indian allies. Cortès used his new allies and lay **siege** to Tenochtitlàn. He captured it in **1521**. The Spanish leveled the city and built on its ruins **Ciudad de Mexico** or Mexico City.⁶¹

Keys to the Conquistador Victory

Even though the Aztecs greatly outnumbered Cortès and his conquistadors, the Spanish were able to topple the vast Aztec empire in a rather short amount of time. The Spanish had several advantages over the Aztecs.

First, the Spanish held a technological advantage. Their guns, cannons, and armor were no match for the Aztecs. A **mounted** soldier carrying an early firearm was a frightening image for the Aztecs who had never seen a gun or a horse.

Secondly, because the Aztecs were hated by the other indigenous tribes for their cruelty, Cortès was able to recruit an estimated 200,000 Indian allies to help fight against the Aztecs.

Timing also played a major role in the Aztecs' defeat. According to Aztec legend, the god Quetzalcoatl was scheduled to return in the year 1519. This was the exact year in which Cortès landed in Mexico. Because the Spanish looked like nothing the Aztecs had ever seen before, Moctezuma may have believed that Cortès was the god Quetzalcoatl.

The Spanish also unknowingly brought with them an invisible and deadly killer-disease. The Aztecs had no immunity against **smallpox**⁶² which the Spanish had brought over with them.


Finally, the different tactics used by the Spanish and the Aztecs had a significant impact on why the Aztecs fought unsuccessfully against the Conquistadors. Because the Aztecs believed so firmly in human sacrifice, they preferred to capture their enemies alive so that they could be sacrificed to appease the gods later. The Spanish, on the other hand, merely killed their enemies rather than capture them.⁶³

⁶¹ Buchenau, 21.


⁶² Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 96.


⁶³ Buchenau, 19.

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The Beginning of a Colony

Cortès and the Conquistadors had set out chasing the myth of the legendary El Dorado like many before and after them. When they didn't find El Dorado, nor as much gold as they had anticipated, they had to look for a new “treasure” in order to gain the wealth they all desperately desired.

The Encomienda System

The encomienda was a labor grant in which the encomendero (conquistadors and their decedents)⁶⁴ was given control over an indigenous community.⁶⁵ The encomendero received tribute and free labor from the Indians under his control. In exchange, the encomendero was to care for the Indians by converting them to Christianity, guaranteeing the safety of the village, and providing for the overall well-being of the Indians.⁶⁶

In theory, the encomienda system was designed to acculturate, control, and protect the Indians.⁶⁷ However, what was supposed to happen in theory did not always happen in practice.

In practice, the encomienda system placed the Indians in a state of serfdom. They were overworked, cheated, physically mistreated, and separated from their families. Generally speaking, the encomienda system demeaned the Indians and created the economic and social problems that are still seen in Mexico to this very day.⁶⁸

Mercantilism

Under the system of mercantilism, the purpose of a colony was to make the mother country stronger and more self-sufficient. Mexico, as a colony of Spain, existed to benefit the mother country...Spain. Mexico supplied raw materials to Spain, and then Spain produced finished goods from those raw materials. Spain then sold the finished goods back to Mexico at a profit.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Chavez, 38.

⁶⁵ Buchenau, 21.

⁶⁶ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 99.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 128.

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The Spanish king was very strict in enforcing the belief that the colony should benefit the mother country. For example, wine and olive oil were important foods of the Spanish diet. They were found on all traditional Spanish tables and wine was necessary for mass. Yet, the profits from these two items were so great for those who lived in Spain, that the growing of vines and olive trees was not allowed in Mexico. Thus, colonists had to pay high prices for something they could easily grow in their own back yard.⁷⁰

Bullionism

The Spanish believed that true wealth consisted of precious metals. Now Cortès and the conquistadors had hoped to find El Dorado or at least some gold, but silver mines, not gold, would go on to provide the wealth of Mexico.⁷¹ Silver mines were notorious as being horrific places to work and many Indians died in the silver mines. Workers only lasted about five years working in a mine.⁷²

The End of the Encomienda System

Repartimiento

One key part of the mercantilist system was that there were workers in the colony that were willing to work. The Spanish were not pleased with the encomienda system. By the 1550s, the encomienda system was on the decline and Spain had also **abolished** slavery. Spain now needed a new way to get labor from Mexico. Thus, the king enacted **repartimiento** which was a system of forced labor. Under this system, each adult Indian male had to contribute 45 days of labor a year, usually a week at a time.⁷³ In theory, the Indians were supposed to be paid and treated fairly. In practice however, they were mistreated, forced to work excessive hours, and cheated out of their pay.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 131-132.

⁷² Jurgen Buchenau, *Mexican Mosaic: A Brief History of Mexico* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2008), 31.

⁷³ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 129.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

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Haciendas

Repartimiento was not the only thing replacing the encomienda system. Soon those in Mexico began creating large haciendas. These were great agricultural estates held by individuals.⁷⁵ These haciendas grew corn and wheat and also were involved with cattle and sheep. Travelers could see cattle herds as large as 150,000 and sheep herds as large as 2 million. In fact, one man was able to acquire over his lifetime a hacienda that was 11,626,850 acres. Hacienda owners acquired land from the Indians through purchase, fraud, or coercion. However, haciendas and villages coexisted in a “synergy that allowed Spaniards to profit modestly...and Indian villages to preserve some autonomy and land.”⁷⁶

The Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church in New Spain was much more than merely a religious institution. The church allowed Spain to justify the conquest because Spain believed it was saving souls.⁷⁷ Thus, the church became the most important institution in the making of New Spain. It was supposed to culturally transform the indigenous tribes by molding the hearts and minds of the conquered peoples. Furthermore, Spain pledged to convert *all* indigenous tribes to Christianity. Spain considered it their mission to defend the Catholic faith where it already existed and spread it to the New World.⁷⁸

Branches of the Church

There were two branches of the church present in New Spain: the Secular clergy and the Regular clergy. The Secular clergy included the priests that served under the bishops.⁷⁹ The Regular clergy was comprised of the missionaries⁸⁰ like the Franciscans, Dominicans, and the Augustinians. The missionaries were considered more dedicated mostly because they were better educated.⁸¹ Soon, there were monasteries over all regions of New Spain.⁸²

⁷⁵ Buchenau, 22.

⁷⁶ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 134-135.

⁷⁷ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds 142.

⁷⁸ Buchenau, 22-23.

⁷⁹ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 142.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁸² Chavez, 37.

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But the church was so much more than just a religious institution. The monasteries served as centers for both spiritual and political teachings. They also served as an area where goods were exchanged and they even taught the Indians that they had some rights.⁸³ The Spaniards who made the long journey from Europe felt the church was a link to the mother country⁸⁴ and in the absence of banks the church also served as a place where the elite could get loans.⁸⁵

“Indian” Catholicism

The indigenous tribes would take the ideas of Catholicism and combine them with part of their own Indian heritage. The focus for these indigenous Catholics was still on family and community life as well as celebrations of the life and agricultural cycle. There were still hunting and healing rituals.⁸⁶ So the Indians were converted to Catholicism, but they blended old beliefs with those of Christianity. The church had to allow this to happen or conversion would have been very difficult. The best example of “Indian” Catholicism was the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The Virgin of Guadalupe

On December 9, 1531 the **Virgin of Guadalupe** appeared to a man by the name of **Juan Diego**. She appeared to Juan as the Virgin Mary, and spoke to him in the language of the Aztecs, Nàhuatl. The Virgin of Guadalupe asked Juan Diego to tell the bishop to build a shrine at the site of their encounter, Tepeyac Hill, so she could give grace to all of those who sought her. Juan told the bishop of his encounter with the Virgin of Guadalupe, but the bishop did not believe Juan and wanted some sort of evidence that Juan was telling the truth.

On December 12, Juan was once again visited by the Virgin of Guadalupe and she ordered Juan to return to Tepeyac Hill. Juan did as he was instructed and when he returned to the hill he found a rose bush flowering on the hill in the middle of winter. He wrapped the roses in his cloak and took them to the bishop. As Juan unwrapped the roses to show the bishop, they fell to the floor and left an image of the Virgin imprinted on the cloth.⁸⁷

Juan Diego became Mexico’s first saint in 2002 and the Virgin of Guadalupe became the patron saint of Mexico. In fact, she was so important that the novelist Carlos Fuentes once stated, “One may no longer consider himself a Christian, but one cannot truly be considered a Mexican unless one believes in the Virgin of Guadalupe.”⁸⁸

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁴ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 154.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁸⁶ Chavèz, 48.

⁸⁷ Buchenau, 23.

⁸⁸ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 143.

The Society of Colonial New Spain

The conquistadors were not colonists but were adventurers. They left their wives at home and traveled to the new world free from domestic life. Thus, from the beginning, Spaniards mixed freely with the female natives. This racial mixing was referred to as *mestizaje*.⁸⁹ There were only three basic ethnic groups in New Spain: Spanish, Indian, and African. And then of course there was the mixing of all three of these groups.⁹⁰

Peninsulares

Peninsulares were born in the country of Spain. These individuals held the highest government jobs and also controlled the mines, were merchants, and wealthy land owners.⁹¹

Criollos

Criollos were entirely of Spanish blood but they were born in the colony of Mexico. *Criollos* looked like *Peninsulares*, but because they were born in the New World they had a lower status in society. Despite their secondary rank, *Criollos* still held a favorable position in society as their light skin made them superior to the “darker” masses. *Criollos* did control some positions in the royal government, church, and military. They were also *hacendados*, miners, and merchants.⁹²

Mestizos

Mestizos comprised the majority of the population of New Spain.⁹³ Most commonly *mestizos* were of Spanish-Indian parentage.⁹⁴ Because of their mixed ancestry, most could not aspire to a higher position in society. *Mestizos* found work as servants, artisans, entrepreneurs, traders, and laborers.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 157.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 159-160.

⁹³ Buchenau, 25.

⁹⁴ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 157.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

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Indians

The Indians, or Native Americans, were considered inferior by the Spaniards. The Spaniards called them *Gente sin razón*, or people without reason. The Spaniards described the Indians as lazy, untrustworthy, and backward. Because the colony's welfare depended on their labor, the Natives were doomed to serve the needs of the Spanish.⁹⁶

Africans

African slaves were also part to the make-up of the society of New Spain. Though considered more reliable than Indian labor, African slaves were expensive as they had to be purchased and brought over from Africa. There were strict regulations placed on Africans in New Spain as they couldn't carry arms, had to observe a curfew, and no more than three could gather in public.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 162.


⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 164-165.


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Inspiring Revolt

Over time, the people of Mexico began to have more and more issues with the Spanish king. At home in Europe, Spain had its own problems when the Hapsburg royal family was replaced by the Bourbons. A new royal family was now in charge of Spain and its colonies which would certainly impact New Spain. Mexicans were also looking at the world around them and were seeing new beliefs emerge during the Enlightenment and witnessed several other colonies achieve independence. Mexicans were soon inspired to achieve their own independence.

Bourbon Reforms

Spain wanted to reaffirm its control over the colony in Mexico and make sure it was staying true to the mercantilist system and supporting the mother country. Thus, in the 1780s, the Crown instituted the [Bourbon Reforms](#). The new system was designed to maximize profit collection, ensure the colony demanded Spanish goods, and created a new tax system that would be collected by the Peninsulares.

These new reforms upset the *Criollos* even though under this new system they were able to get high paying jobs in the military. The *Criollos* were forced to pay higher taxes and were also being removed from the top government jobs. The *Criollos* believed they were the true Mexicans, descendants of the conquistadors but linked to the Aztec past by their birth in New Spain. Soon, a national conscious formed. There was a sense that Mexico was a geographical and cultural space much different from Spain.⁹⁸ *Criollos* started celebrating their native culture or their [mexicanidad](#).⁹⁹ They no longer called themselves criollos, but instead preferred to be called [mexicanos](#).¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, The Virgin of Guadalupe gave *criollos*, *mestizos*, and Indians a shared sense of identity-they were Mexicans.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Buchenau, 32.

⁹⁹ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 213.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Buchenau, 33.

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The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was an age of reason and science. One of the greatest Enlightenment thinkers was John Locke. He wrote that government exists to protect life, liberty, and property. The Enlightenment encouraged the values of liberty, citizenship,¹⁰² freedom, and equality.¹⁰³ Soon the Criollos and others wanted these natural rights in Mexico.

The American Revolution

Just to the North of Mexico, a group of colonies fought for its independence starting in the 1770s. The members of the 13 colonies banded together to revolt against King George III of Great Britain. Amazingly enough, the colonists won and were able to achieve independence. The American Revolution became a model for all the Latin American countries. The American colonists attacked the idea of colonial empires. They showed the Criollos that people could take history into their own hands.¹⁰⁴

The French Revolution

Not long after the American Revolution concluded, the people of France revolted against their king. The French people over-threw one of Europe's most powerful monarchies. Once again this revolution reinforced the values of liberty and equality to the Mexican people.¹⁰⁵

The Haitian Revolution

The French Revolution inspired the small island of Haiti to revolt. The Haitian Revolution was a bit different, as it was a slave revolt in which non-whites sought their freedom. However, the Haitian Revolution served more as a warning for Criollos as it portrayed the social dangers of independence as they did not want the lower classes to gain any political power.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 217.

¹⁰⁴ Buchenau, 33.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Section 1: Inspiring Revolt

Social vs. Political Revolution

Criollos recognized that revolution was destructive and involved international wars. They knew many would lose their lives to achieve independence. That was fine with *Criollos*, as long as their revolution would be like the American Revolution which left the social hierarchy intact, unlike the French and Haitian Revolutions.¹⁰⁷ *Criollos* wanted to remain in power after independence. They did not want the lower classes, the *mestizos*, Indians, and Africans, to achieve any political power.

In the end, both the American Revolution and the Haitian Revolt were successfully completed by populations smaller than Mexico's and both had overthrown world powers greater than Spain.¹⁰⁸ The *Criollos* were thus inspired to take the risk and fight for independence against Spain.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*


¹⁰⁸ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 211.


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Mexican Independence

With all of the revolutionary movements happening around the world, it was only a matter of time before the Mexicans caught the revolutionary spirit and began the process of overthrowing the **tyranny** of Spain. In the process to overthrow Spanish rule, several key revolutionary leaders emerged to lead Mexico towards its independence.

Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla

Father Hidalgo was a *Criollo* but was not your typical priest as he was a known gambler and even had three children with two different women.¹⁰⁹ However, even though he was flawed as a priest, he was still considered the father of the Mexican independence movement.¹¹⁰

Early on September 16, 1810, Father Hidalgo rang the town's church bells to call the people to mass. He was about to be arrested as a conspirator against the crown. As the people assembled he gave his famous speech, *the grito de Dolores*, or Cry of Dolores. This speech started the war that ultimately freed Mexico from Spain.¹¹¹

“My children: a new dispensation comes to us today. Will you receive it? Will you free yourselves? Will you recover the lands stolen three hundred years ago from your forefathers by the hated Spaniards? We must act at once....Will you not defend your religion and your rights as true patriots? Long live our Lady of Guadalupe! Death to bad government! Death to the Peninsulares!”¹¹²

Hidalgo made the brilliant decision of choosing as the symbol of the independence movement the Virgin of Guadalupe. She became a unifying force for the people.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Buchenau, 38.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹² Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 222.

¹¹³ Buchenau, 40.

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Unfortunately, Hidalgo had no military training and was not able to control his army and his rebellion stalled.¹¹⁴ He was captured and found guilty of treason.¹¹⁵ He was executed in front of a firing squad,¹¹⁶ and was decapitated with his head placed on a pole as a warning to other independence fighters.¹¹⁷

José María Morelos y Pavón

Josè Morelos would replace Hidalgo as the leader of the revolution. Unlike Hidalgo, Morelos was a *mestizo*. And also unlike Hidalgo, Morelos was a brilliant military leader who used *guerrilla* tactics to win several key victories towards Mexican independence.¹¹⁸

Because Morelos was a *mestizo* and brought the lower classes into the revolution, the *Peninsulares* and *Criollos* become afraid of mob violence (social revolution) and preferred Spanish rule to Morelos' rebellion which they viewed as chaos.¹¹⁹ The *Peninsulares* and *Criollos* would rather bow to a king than to lose their power. Soon the *Criollos* and *Peninsulares* had hunted down Morelos. They placed him in front of the firing squad and executed him. He too was decapitated and his head placed on the same wall as Hidalgo's.¹²⁰

Agustín de Iturbide

One of the people ordered to hunt down Morelos was Agustín de Iturbide.¹²¹ For a decade, he had fought *against* the rebels on the side of the Spanish king.¹²² After he tracked down Morelos, he was after the new leader of the rebellion, Vicente Guerrero.¹²³ However, Iturbide would eventually get removed from his command because he was a cruel commander. This caused tension between Iturbide and his commanding officer and Iturbide wanted revenge for being removed from his command.¹²⁴

Iturbide would meet with Guerrero, his one-time enemy, and planned a *coup d'état* to join Guerrero to overthrow the Spanish colonial authorities. Together, Guerrero and Iturbide created the *Plan of Iguala*.¹²⁵

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 224.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 227.

¹²³ Buchenau, 42.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

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Plan of Iguala

The Plan of Iguala was comprised of three key components. First, there would be equal treatment under the law for both *Peninsulares* and *Criollos*. Second, Catholicism would be the official religion of Mexico. And third, Mexico would be a moderate monarchy. There was even talk of inviting a European prince to govern Mexico. The three parts of the plan were known as union, religion, and independence, or the Three Guarantees. The Three Guarantees were represented on the Mexican flag. Red represents the union of America and Europe, or the blood of the *Criollos* and the *Peninsulares*. The color white represents the purity of the Catholic faith. The color green represents the hope of independence. The Plan of Iguala was actually a compromise. Instead of asking for the death of the *Peninsulares*, Iturbide actually showed them some favor.¹²⁶ Iturbide would thus be the one to lead Mexico to independence from Spain.

Impact of Independence

The impact of independence was that it set several precedents that would plague Mexico for centuries. First, revolutionary movements were almost always preceded by a plan that outlines the goals in order to gain wider support from the people.¹²⁷ For a century, the military was very much involved in politics and would bargain with enemies for a greater share in the nation's wealth.¹²⁸ And lastly, the precedent of coup d'état would be well established in Mexican politics. Instead of using the vote to remove a leader, more often than not, a Mexican leader would be overthrown through a coup.

Iturbide Takes Power

It did not take long for Iturbide to elevate himself to the position of emperor of Mexico. In fact, he made himself *Generalísimo de Tierra y mar* (highest general of the earth and sea) and gave himself a large salary.¹²⁹ However, Iturbide's reign would not last long as he created and inherited many problems that Mexico faced as an infant nation. In the end, Iturbide was merely emperor in name but in reality he was only a *caudillo*-a charismatic military leader with a personal following.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 228.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹²⁹ Buchenau, 44.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.

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Iturbide's Issues

The independence movement had left Mexico in a bit of chaos. First, the silver mining was destroyed which meant the national currency had no support. Secondly, individuals that had money and [capital](#) were investing their money outside of Mexico. Furthermore, agricultural production had decreased causing food prices to rise. And lastly, Iturbide had a large standing army and over 40,000 officers he had to pay.¹³¹

Although Iturbide inherited several key problems of an independent Mexico, he also didn't do much to make the people of Mexico like him. Iturbide was criticized for [nepotism](#). He awarded noble titles to his family and even made the birthdays of his immediate family national holidays. If a person wanted to see Iturbide, that person had to kneel and kiss his hand.¹³²

However, Iturbide's greatest mistake came when he would set a horrific precedent that plagued Mexico for the rest of the 19th century. He became the first Mexican head of state to abolish or dissolve a [legislative branch](#) that opposed him.¹³³

The End of Iturbide's Reign

Iturbide was not a popular leader amongst many people in Mexico. Enter a man who will leave his stamp on Mexico for the next several decades—Antonio de Padua María Severino López de Santa Anna y Pérez de Lebrón—many will just call him [Santa Anna](#). Santa Anna sensed Iturbide was losing popularity and could be overthrown. Thus, he entered the scene with his own plan, the [Plan de Veracruz](#) in which he proclaimed Mexico a [republic](#).¹³⁴ Iturbide would eventually be arrested for [treason](#) and would meet his demise in front of a Mexican firing squad.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Buchenau, 45.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 45.


¹³³ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*


¹³⁵ Meyers, Sherman, and Deeds, 244.


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Forming a Republic

Mexico under Iturbide's rule did not go well. After his execution, the Mexicans wanted to create a **republican** government. However, even though most Mexicans wanted to create a republic, they could not agree on how to establish their new government. Thus, two groups, the **centralists** and the **federalists**, fought for power in an attempt to mold the new Mexican republican government.

Centralism vs. Federalism

Centralism was based on the idea that the new Mexican government should have a strong central government. Centralists also argued that the Catholic church should maintain a strong political influence within the new Mexican nation.

Federalists simply maintained the opposite views as those of the centralists. **Federalism** argued that the new nation should maintain a weak central government. Federalists believed that the political strength should be held in the independent states within Mexico. Federalists also wanted to end the special privileges of the Church.¹³⁶

The Constitution of 1824

Eventually the centralists and the federalists **compromised** and created the Constitution of 1824 which organized Mexico into a republic with 19 states and four territories. The federal government under the Constitution of 1824 had three branches: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial.

Clearly, there were some similarities to the Constitution of 1824 and the U.S. Constitution. Just like in the United States, the job of the executive in Mexico was to execute the laws, the legislative branch made the laws, and the judicial branch interpreted the laws.

The Mexican legislative branch, or Congress, had two houses: the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. Each state would get two representatives in the

¹³⁶ Buchenau, 46.

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Senate but representation in the Chamber of Deputies would be based on each state's population. The executive, or President, would be elected by state legislatures and serve a four year term. The division of power within the Mexican federal government pleased the federalists.

The centralists also got something they wanted out of the Constitution of 1824. Under the new constitution, the Catholic Church would get to maintain its power. Furthermore, in times of emergency, the President would be given emergency powers and would be allowed to make decisions like a dictator without consulting the **Congress**.¹³⁷

Caudillos

Caudillos, or charismatic military leaders with a personal followings, did not show much respect for the newly created constitution.¹³⁸ *Caudillos* had armies at their personal command and they thus fought for power after independence. Their power rested on their charisma and personal alliances in which the caudillos promised a material benefit to their followers, or clients, who returned the favor by pledging their loyalty to the caudillo. This practice was known as **clientelism**. Clientelism was the practice of using family, marriage, and friendship to forge important economic and political networks. *Caudillos* used the political philosophies of centralism and federalism to serve their own ambition and thus many would change from federalists to centralists and back again to benefit themselves.¹³⁹

A Troubled Start

The first president under the new republican constitution was Guadalupe Victoria. He had a hard time dealing with the *caudillos*, especially Santa Anna.¹⁴⁰ In fact, his own Vice President tried to overthrow him, even though the attempt was unsuccessful. When it came time for the second election, Santa Anna and others did not like the results and made **Vicente Guerrero** the second president.¹⁴¹

Just as Guerrero took office, Spain attempted to recapture its colony. They were repelled by Santa Anna. After the failed attempt at re-conquest, many Spaniards left Mexico. They felt like they would be targeted. Because these Spaniards had money, when they left, a lot of money and other resources also left Mexico. Thus, Spanish investors were replaced by British, French, and German merchants. This made Mexico extremely dependent on European powers.¹⁴² That was not a good thing for Mexico.

¹³⁷ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 242.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹³⁹ Buchenau, 48.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

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Under the new Constitution, the president could act like a dictator in times of emergency. The Spanish crown's attempted re-colonization of Mexico was an emergency. When the Spanish were defeated, Guerrero refused to give up his power. Guerrero's own vice president staged yet another coup and was successful. Guerrero tried to escape the country unsuccessfully and was eventually captured. Found guilty of treason, he too died at the hands of a firing squad, just like Hidalgo, Morelos, and Iturbide.¹⁴³ Mexico now turned to Santa Anna for leadership.

Santa Anna

Between 1821-1850 Mexico had 50 changes in its government. Eleven of those times involved Santa Anna surrendering and retaking power.¹⁴⁴ The average term in office was only seven and half months.¹⁴⁵ Santa Anna, like most caudillos, switched back and forth in his allegiances. Up until 1834, Santa Anna was described as a federalist. After 1834, he was a centralist.¹⁴⁶ Santa Anna played such an important part in Mexican history that it was said that "...post-independence Mexican political history was the history of Santa Anna's revolutions."¹⁴⁷

Santa Anna was born in 1794. He was a Criollo and joined the army at the age of 16. When Iturbide switched sides in the fight for independence, Santa Anna followed Iturbide's lead and switched sides as well.¹⁴⁸ Ironically, he would be one of many who helped to overthrow Iturbide.

As President eleven different times, he got bored with the daily affairs of running the country and went home and left the ruling of Mexico to his vice president.¹⁴⁹ He made everyone call him "His Most Serene Highness."¹⁵⁰ More often than not, he portrayed himself as protector of the fatherland as he attempted to repel the Spanish, the French, and the Americans.¹⁵¹ He will even lose his leg fighting the French in what will become known as the "Pastry War."¹⁵²

¹⁴³ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 247.

¹⁴⁴ Chavez, 117.

¹⁴⁵ Meyer, Sherman, Deeds, 249.

¹⁴⁶ Chavez, 135.

¹⁴⁷ Buchenau, 49.

¹⁴⁸ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 249.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 250.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹⁵¹ Buchenau, 49.


¹⁵² Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 264.


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Trouble in Texas

For Mexico, Texas was a distant frontier. In the year 1800, Texas only had about 7,000 people living in the area. Mexico hoped to establish a buffer zone against both the encroaching Native American tribes and the Americans who were pushing westward. Their plan, however, would only serve to backfire and cause major issues between the United States and Mexico.

Americans are Invited to Texas

Mexico gave permission to **Moses Austin**, and later his son **Stephen Austin**, to settle 300 American families in Texas as long as they were Catholic, had good moral character, and agreed to follow Mexican laws.¹⁵³ Land in Texas was almost free—it was only ten cents an acre compared to \$1.25 in the United States. The idea worked. By 1835, Mexico had 30,000 people. However, only 7,800 of those were Mexican. It did not take long for tension to mount between the American colonists and the Mexican government as the Americans stopped following the Catholic faith and some were even fugitives.¹⁵⁴

Tensions grow

In 1836, Santa Anna would once again be back in power after he gave it up for a short period. This time, however, he had shifted gears from being a federalist to a centralist. In 1836, he would abolish the Constitution of 1824 and create the new **Constitution of 1836**. The new constitution favored the centralists. The states were downgraded to departments run by a governor appointed by the central government.¹⁵⁵

As the Americans living in Texas continued to ignore the rules established in order to be colonists in the country of Mexico, the Mexican government began to crack down on the Texans. First, in 1829, the Mexicans had abolished slavery. This upset the Texans who had brought their slaves into Mexico. In 1830, Mexico closed all immigration from the United States. Ironically, during the early 1830s, it

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 252-253.

¹⁵⁵ Meyer, Sherman, 251.

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was the Americans that were migrating illegally into Mexico. And lastly, as mentioned above, Santa Anna became a centralist and **annulled** the Constitution of 1824. In doing so, he reduced the voice the Texans had in the Mexican government.

War on the Texas Frontier

Santa Anna had enough of the Texans ignoring Mexican laws and once again took up arms. This time he went to war against mostly American colonists living in Texas. He won a victory at the **Alamo** and would not allow any Texan defenders of that old Spanish mission to leave with their lives. The Mexicans also caught the Texans out in the open at **Goliad**. Hundreds of Texans were massacred.

Santa Anna seemed to be doing quite well until he was caught off guard by **Sam Houston** at **San Jacinto** and lost a decisive victory in only an 18-minute battle. Two days later, Santa Anna was captured and signed a treaty.¹⁵⁶

Texas was now an independent nation—the **Lone Star Republic**—from 1836-1845. It would not become a part of the United States until 1845. Mexico should have easily been able to re-take Texas but Mexico was so troubled with internal issues it could never get Texas back.¹⁵⁷

The Mexican-American War

In 1845, the United States would **annex** Texas. Soon the two nations would find themselves feuding over what the official boundary between the two nations should be—the Nueces River or the Rio Bravo River.

War Erupts on the Border

New President of the United States, **James K. Polk**, was truly looking to expand. He wanted not just more of Texas, but California and some other pieces of Mexico as well. When Mexico said no to Polk purchasing the land, he came up with a new plan. He sent **General Zachary Taylor** into the disputed territory between the Nueces and Rio Bravo Rivers. When Taylor was attacked by Mexican forces, Polk went to congress stating that American blood had been spilled on “American” soil. The U.S. Congress declared war on Mexico.

The Mexicans believed the Americans had taken Texas and now were trying to get their hands on more of Mexico’s land. When Mexico tried to defend itself against further encroachment, the Americans cried the Mexicans had invaded the United States. Mexico was once again at war and once again Santa Anna

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

¹⁵⁷ Meyers, Sherman, and Deeds, 255.

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returned from his failure in his dealing with the Texans to once again defend the fatherland against the U.S. army.¹⁵⁸

Battle for Chapultepec Castle

The Mexicans had a difficult time stopping the American army as it advanced towards Mexico City even though the Mexican army was larger and more experienced. On the outskirts of Mexico City, Santa Anna made his last stand at **Chapultepec Castle**. This was the battle that ended the war. It was located on a 200-foot hill and was surrounded by a thick stone wall. The castle was defended by the cadets of the Mexican military academy. The castle was stormed by Americans and there was bitter hand-to-hand combat. The last defenders were the cadets, or **Niños Héroes**. Rather than surrender, they chose to die in battle. The youngest, **Juan Escutia**, wrapped himself in the Mexican flag and jumped to his death rather than let the Americans capture the flag.¹⁵⁹

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

The Americans were soon in Mexico City. The Mexicans had no choice but to settle for peace. Under the **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**, the treaty that ended the war, Mexico lost half its territory and received only a \$15 million payment from United States.


The war and the treaty had a tremendous impact on Mexico. First, Mexico would lose the border dispute surrounding Texas, California, and what the Americans would call the New Mexico territory. This was half of Mexico's land. To make matters worse, in 1849, gold was discovered in California. However, California was no longer a part of Mexico. Hostility and mistrust would arise between the two nations and continues till this very day. Stereotypes and prejudices emerged. The Mexicans would develop **Yankeeophobia**. Their country was humiliated. The relationship between the two nations would be described as **asymmetrical** because the U.S. had power over Mexico.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Meyer, Sherman, Deeds, 258.


¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 262-263.


¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

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A New Era for Mexico

In 1855, Santa Anna was finally ousted from power through the Revolution of Ayutla.¹⁶¹ Mexico would look to make changes to the way its government functioned. A new leader emerged in the form of the Zapotec Indian, Benito Juárez. He attempted to revitalize Mexican politics.

The Reform

With the ousting of Santa Anna, Mexico entered a period known as The Reform.¹⁶² The purpose was to create a more modern and democratic nation.

There were three major laws that came out of The Reform.¹⁶³ The first law, *Ley Juárez*, made the military and church stand trial in civil court. This created equality before the law. The second law, *Ley Lerdo*, cut back on the amount of land the church could own. And the last law, *Ley Iglesias*, forbade the church from charging high fees for giving sacraments. The poor would get the sacraments for free.

A new constitution was also created, the Constitution of 1857.¹⁶⁴ It was very similar to the Constitution of 1824 except the legislative branch had a one house legislature, the laws of *Ley Juárez*, *Ley Lerdo*, and *Ley Iglesias* were included, and there was freedom of speech, press, and education.¹⁶⁵

The War of the Reform

The Church and the military would not accept the new constitution and its laws like *Ley Juárez*, *Ley Iglesias*, and the other freedoms it granted. Even Pope Pius IX declared the Mexican constitution invalid. Mexicans faced quite a dilemma. If they didn't follow the constitution they were considered traitors to their country, if they did follow the constitution they were considered heretics in the eyes of the church. The Reform laws and the constitution divided the Mexican people into two camps and once again there was a war. The War of the Reform, 1858-1861, was the most horrific civil war to date.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Meyer, Sherman, and. Deeds, 283.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 285.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 285-286.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 287.

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During the war, there were two governments in Mexico with Juárez at the head of one and Felix Zuloaga at the head of another. After three horrendous years of fighting, Juárez would emerge victorious and would win the presidential election of 1861. However, there was more trouble on the horizon for him, and this time the trouble was not domestic but foreign.¹⁶⁶


¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 287-290.

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Foreign Powers Return to Mexico

Mexico was always greatly dependent on foreign money and capital. The War of the Reform had cost Mexico quite a large sum, so they were forced to borrow from Great Britain, France, and Spain. Mexico did not have the money to pay off their loans. Great Britain, France, and Spain sent troops to Mexico to collect their money.¹⁶⁷

Little did Spain and Great Britain realize that **Napoleon III** of France wanted more than his money back. He wanted a French colony. Upon realizing this, Spain and Great Britain removed their troops leaving France to fight alone against Mexico.¹⁶⁸

Battle of Puebla

The French began their march inland from the coast and were crushing the Mexican army until they ran into trouble at the town of Puebla. On **May 5, 1862 the Battle of Puebla** was fought. The Mexicans achieved a great victory with the help of a mestizo general by the name of Porfirio Díaz. This was why Mexicans and Americans celebrate Cinco de Mayo. It has nothing to do with Mexican independence. In fact, it was just one battle that Mexico won. A year later the French would march into Mexico City unopposed.¹⁶⁹

The French Monarchs

Napoleon decided to make Mexico a monarchy and placed the young couple **Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian** and his wife **Charlotte (Carlota)** on the Mexican throne. The two arrived in 1864.¹⁷⁰ The Mexicans did not come out to meet Carlota which greatly upset her so she wept because she wanted to feel welcomed in Mexico.¹⁷¹ They eventually made it to Mexico City and made their home in Chapultepec Castle.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Buchenau, 56.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 293.

¹⁷² Buchenau, 58.

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Benito Juárez retreated to the Mexican border where he fought against the French using guerrilla warfare.¹⁷³ Maximilian fought against him for his entire reign.

Maximilian did not make any allies as ruler of Mexico as he allowed for the freedom of the press and even treated the church the same way as Benito Juárez.¹⁷⁴ This turned out to be a poor move as the church was actually supporting the French invasion. In essence, he upset many people, which certainly didn't help him rule Mexico for an extended period of time.

Under the Monroe Doctrine, the U.S. had warned foreign powers to stay out of the western hemisphere. The U.S. certainly did not want a French colony so close to its borders. However, in the early 1860s, the U.S. was preoccupied with its own Civil War. The North had to be careful not to push France into an alliance with the Confederacy.¹⁷⁵ Benito Juárez had to wait until the American Civil War was over. Abraham Lincoln, and after his death, William Seward, Lincoln's Secretary of State, pressured Napoleon and even allowed Americans to sell guns to Benito Juárez. Thus, Napoleon began removing troops from Mexico.¹⁷⁶

Carlota returned to Europe to try to get Napoleon and others to help her husband. She even asked the Pope, but he refused to send help. He was not happy with the way Maximilian had treated the church in Mexico. Maximilian wanted to leave, but Carlota convinced him to stay in Mexico.¹⁷⁷

With the French troops leaving, it did not take long for Maximilian to lose power and get captured. He was tried, found guilty, and executed. This action by Juárez sent a message to the rest of the world that Mexico was an independent nation.¹⁷⁸

Impact of the Intervention

The French Intervention had a tremendous impact on Mexican. First, it showed that Mexico was an independent nation.¹⁷⁹ Mexican nationalism increased and it was a victory for the Constitution of 1857. However, Mexico would continue to lack political stability and economic growth for years.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷³ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 295.

¹⁷⁴ Buchenau, 59.

¹⁷⁵ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 295.

¹⁷⁶ Buchenau, 59.

¹⁷⁷ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 296.

¹⁷⁸ Buchenau, 59.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 297-298.

The Restored Republic

With the French monarchy removed from Mexican soil, Benito Juárez would return to power. Though free from foreign intervention for the time being, Juárez now had to deal with the many internal issues plaguing Mexico and its people.

Issues after the French Intervention

Benito Juárez was once again President of Mexico but he had a nation that was facing a host of problems. The Mexican treasury had no money and the federal government had very little power. And to make matters even worse, the caudillos were still maintaining power. The nation had an extremely poor **infrastructure** and communication systems. Mexico's silver mines, so key to Mexico's fortunes, became unproductive. Lastly, as of 1874, 95% of Mexico's children did not attend school which led to mass illiteracy in the nation.¹⁸¹

Juárez Asserts his Authority

To deal with the many issues facing Mexico, Benito Juárez became a more **authoritarian** type of ruler. He rigged elections to make sure his favorites obtained and maintained power. He tried to limit the powers of the Congress and states by amending the Constitution. He also created the **rurales**, a group of **mounted** and heavily armed military guards. In truth, many of the *rurales* were former bandits hired to work for the government.¹⁸²

Positivism

It was during this era that a new kind of political philosophy emerged- **positivism**. Positivism emphasized the economic development of a nation and the building of a strong nation. Positivists believed all problems had a scientific and rational solution. This kind of scientific politics argued that scientists and engineers, not politicians, should shape a nation's future.¹⁸³

A Mexican First

The Mexican people would lose one of their greatest heroes when Benito Juárez died in his second term in office. His vice president, **Sebastian Lerdo** replaced him and was later elected to his own four year term. This was a rather significant event as it was the first time in Mexican history that two consecutive

¹⁸¹ Buchenau, 61.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 63.

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administrations had not been overthrown by revolution.¹⁸⁴ That, however, would not last for long.

Enter Porfirio Díaz

Porfirio Díaz, the hero at Puebla on Cinco de Mayo, fought during the civil wars and the French Intervention.¹⁸⁵ He felt that the presidency should be his. He had lost two elections to Benito Juárez, and on two other occasions had attempted to overthrow the government by force. Díaz knew Lerdo was afraid of building railroads to the U.S. border (Lerdo was believed to have said, “Between weakness and strength, let there be the desert!”).¹⁸⁶ Díaz approached some U.S. investors from South Texas and with the help of their money he staged yet another coup under the **Plan of Tuxtepec**. Under this plan, Díaz argued that Lerdo had committed widespread voter fraud and that Lerdo was seeking yet another term as president despite a rule in the Constitution that forbade reelection.¹⁸⁷ Thus Díaz would rise to power and go on to rule Mexico for the next 35 years.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*


¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*


¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

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The Porfiriato

Porfirio Díaz would gain power in 1876. We would not lose control of Mexico until 1911. The 35 years that Díaz was dictator of Mexico became known as the Porfiriato.

Order, Progress, & the Científicos

The catch phrase for the Porfiriato was the positivist phrase “order and progress.” The positivists admired U.S. technology and French Culture. Díaz even made himself look like a French General.¹⁸⁸ They believed that Mexico could contribute to the world.¹⁸⁹

Díaz surrounded himself with a group of advisors known as the *Científicos*. They believed in the scientific management of Mexico and that political stability would bring foreign investment. *Científicos* were a circle of positivist advisors that would rise to great political and financial importance during the Porfiriato. They would control the power with Díaz and he maintained their loyalty through clientelism.¹⁹⁰ *Científicos* hated the rural illiterate masses. They blamed the poor masses for Mexico’s failure to progress.¹⁹¹ *Científicos* believed the future was with the *criollo* elite-this created a bigger gap between rich and poor.¹⁹²

The *Científicos* and Díaz also believed there needed to be rule of law (order and progress/positivism) if they were going to get foreign investment into Mexico to help modernize. In other words, Díaz was creating “modernization from without.”

¹⁸⁸ Buchenau, 68.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁹¹ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 328.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

Section 7: The Porfiriato

Foreign Investment in Mexico

Díaz wanted to improve the railroads in Mexico. In 1876, Mexico had 400 miles of railroad track. By 1911, it would have 15,000 miles of track.¹⁹³ Díaz also improved the mining and oil business in Mexico. However, all of these improvements came at a cost. Below are some statistics dealing with foreign investment during the Porfiriato:

- 80% of the money for the railroad came from the U.S.¹⁹⁴
- U.S. invested \$12 million in mining¹⁹⁵
- U.S. and Great Britain controlled 96% of the mining
- 22% of Mexico's land surface was controlled by the U.S.
- By 1911, there is a total of \$1 billion invested in Mexico total- 40% of that investment was foreign

This foreign investment was initially good for Mexico but it would have long term consequences as foreigners were driving the Mexican economy. Mexico would see **capital flight** and its citizens suffered damaged national pride for they believed Díaz had sold them out.

Some Positives of the Porfiriato

However, by the time Díaz left power, Mexico would be one of the largest exporters of oil in the world. The volume of goods manufactured in Mexico doubled.¹⁹⁶ The Mexican treasury had a surplus.¹⁹⁷ Mexico had good foreign credit, and the elite and wealthy had a sense of self-confidence.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 330.

¹⁹⁴ Meyers, Sherman, and Deeds, 330.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 333.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 329.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 335.

The Downfall of Díaz

Rich get richer, poor get poorer

The Porfiriato was definitely an example of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. By 1910, half the Mexican population lived and worked on a hacienda as peones. Peones were 12 times poorer than a U.S. farmer.¹⁹⁹ They worked from sunrise to sunset seven days a week. They were paid in metal discs that could only be redeemed at the tienda de raya, an all-purpose company store on the hacienda. The store would give credit freely and charged high prices. A peone could never leave the hacienda as long as they owed money. This was called debt peonage.²⁰⁰

Díaz had developed his country at the expense of his countrymen. He paid no attention to the needs of the poor majority. The wealth he was able to generate did not trickle down to the masses. In fact, the cost of modernization for the poor had come at a great cost.²⁰¹ How then, was Díaz able to maintain power for so long?

Pan o Palo

Díaz was able to maintain his power through his *pan o palo* (bread or stick) philosophy. The “bread” was given to the elite as Díaz sought to keep them happy and loyal by buying their support to create political stability to prevent foreign intervention like Mexico had seen with the French. Díaz also allowed the elite to maximize their wealth through the control of the poor working class.

The “stick” was the brute force Díaz used against his political enemies and the masses. He used the rurales as an intimidation force. In fact, a quarter of the Mexican budget was spent on the military and the rurales. Díaz needed “forced peace” for modernization.²⁰² The rurales were feared by marauders, political opponents, and villagers alike.²⁰³

As dictator, Díaz used other methods to maintain his power as well. He rigged elections, allowed no freedom of the press, supported the church, and had a Congress that was a rubber stamp.

However, for all of his strategies to maintain power, the people of Mexico would have enough of Porfirio Díaz. His forced exit from power set the stage for a bloody struggle to determine who and how Mexico would be governed in the future.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 342.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 343.


²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 345.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 339.


²⁰³ *Ibid.*


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The Seeds of Revolution

The *pan o palo* philosophy served Porfirio Díaz well for nearly 35 years. However, Mexicans of all social classes found his regime overbearing. Some in the upper class believed Díaz had sold them out to foreign investment. The Mexican middle class wanted a more democratic government, and of course the peones were tremendously mistreated under the Díaz dictatorship.

Francisco Madero and the Guerrilleros

Francisco Madero was one man who was tired of Díaz. Madero issued the Plan de San Luis Potosí. Soon thousands of Mexicans were taking up arms from all social classes to rid Mexico of Díaz. Many Mexicans became *guerrilleros*. *Guerrilleros* had no uniforms, no military discipline, and lived off the land and attacked local authorities and small military outposts.²⁰⁴ One general that led a band of *guerrilleros* and was a follower of Madero was Pablo Orozco.

The Battle of Ciudad Juárez

Orozco would eventually trap Díaz's forces in the city of Juárez just across from the U.S. border. Madero ordered Orozco not to attack because the city was so close to the U.S. and Madero did not want to have an incident where anyone from the U.S. would be injured. Orozco disobeyed Madero but won the battle. As a result, Díaz was forced to leave Mexico.

With Díaz finally out of the picture, it appeared that Madero would become Mexico's next leader. But the revolutionaries and the *guerrilleros* of Mexico were only united in one thing—getting rid of Díaz. Because Orozco had disobeyed Madero's orders, Madero did not put Orozco in his cabinet. This created a split between the two men and thus the unity of the revolution began falling apart. Because there was no unifying philosophy of the Mexican revolution, the military would continue to challenge civilian leadership. Factions and personal rivalries turned Mexican against Mexican allowing the war and violence to drag on. This ultimately increased the loss of life during the revolution and increased the pain and misery for thousands upon thousands of Mexicans.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds 371.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 372-373.

The Fiesta of Bullets

Assassinations

Madero eventually became president, but he soon made enemies of several major guerrilleros leaders including Pablo Orozco and Emiliano Zapata (Zapata demanded land reform-he wanted all the lands seized under the Díaz regime to be returned to the peones).²⁰⁶ Both Orozco and Zapata led rebellions against Madero.

Madero sent Victoriano Huerta to deal with the uprising against Pablo Orozco. Fighting with Huerta was another famous guerrillero, Pancho Villa, and a man by the name of Alvaro Obregón. These men were able to defeat Orozco and he was exiled from the country.²⁰⁷

However, Madero's problems were far from over. Victoriano Huerta believed he would make a better leader for Mexico. He staged a coup and had Madero arrested. Later, Huerta had Madero assassinated while being moved from jail.²⁰⁸

Huerta was not well liked by Zapata and Venustiano Carranza. Even some of Huerta's former allies like Pancho Villa and Alvaro Obregón turned against him. These men agreed on nothing other than the fact they wanted to get rid of Huerta.²⁰⁹ Huerta was no match for these men and he was forced from power.

With Huerta removed from power, Venustiano Carranza became president of Mexico. However, both Villa and Zapata turned against Carranza. Carranza was able to deal with Zapata by having him assassinated.²¹⁰ Ironically, Carranza's time would also be short lived. He too was ambushed and assassinated by men loyal to Alvaro Obregón. This was the last assassination of a sitting Mexican president.²¹¹ A few years later, the last of the great Mexican revolutionaries, Pancho Villa, would also be assassinated.

Impact of the Revolution

To say the Mexican Revolution was a key event in Mexican history would certainly be an understatement. First of all, it was the most important event that happened in 20th century Mexico. Secondly, it was the first social revolution of the 20th century.²¹² And thirdly, it was extremely violent. During the war years, between 1.5 and two million Mexicans were killed. That meant that nearly ten percent of the

²⁰⁶ Buchenau, 80.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁰⁸ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds., 386.

²⁰⁹ Buchenau, 82.

²¹⁰ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds, 408.

²¹¹ Buchenau, 89.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 79.

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Mexican population died in the revolution. Captured soldiers were executed and there were horror stories of hangings and other mutilations of soldiers. The Mexican infrastructure was destroyed. And yet by 1920, the Mexican nation was not done with its revolution, but began rebuilding its nation out of the ashes from the Fiesta of Bullets.²¹³

The Constitution of 1917

The Mexicans wrote several constitutions throughout the course of their history. The Mexican Revolution created an environment of change and thus the Mexicans once again generated a new government. The Constitution of 1917 was certainly unique as it was first in the entire world that contained a social agenda.²¹⁴ Furthermore, it sought to separate the church from the governing of the nation.

Article 27

Article 27 was a very important piece of the Mexican constitution. It stated that the land and the subsoil belonged to the Mexican nation, and that foreigners could only gain access to the natural resources of Mexico by applying to the federal government. This was certainly a reaction to the Díaz regime when he was accused of selling out Mexico's resources to foreign investors.

Part of Article 27 was land reform for the landless. In order to achieve that goal, the Mexican government could expropriate, or nationalize, private property that was either owned by Mexicans or foreigners, and in both rural and urban areas. Owners whose land was expropriated by the government were to be paid for their loss.

Article 123

Article 123 of the Mexican constitution was another key part of the document created to help bring social change to Mexico. This article dealt with working conditions. It created an eight-hour work day, six-day work week, established a minimum wage, and abolished debt peonage.²¹⁵

²¹³ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds., 411.

²¹⁴ Buchenau, 88.

²¹⁵ Chavez, 232.

The Constructive Phase of the Revolution


Following the Fiesta of Bullets, Mexico entered an era of the revolution known as the **Constructive Phase**. This part of the Revolution lasted roughly between the years of 1920-1940 and focused more on the rebuilding of Mexico under the guidelines established in the Constitution of 1917.

The Sonoran Triangle


The Constructive phase was led by three consecutive presidents who came from the region of Mexico known as Sonora. Thus, these three men, **Adolfo de la Huerta**, **Alvaro Obregón**, and **Plutarco Calles** became known as the **Sonoran Triangle**. These men created a precedent that came to have a lasting impression on Mexican politics—the practice of **dedazo**. *Dedazo*, or finger point, was the precedent of the outgoing president choosing his successor. For example, de la Huerta supported Obregón and wanted him to be the next president, and in return Obregón did the same for Calles. This practice lasted for the remainder of the 20th century.²¹⁶


²¹⁶ Buchenau, 92.

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A New President Takes Office

When it became time for Plutarco Calles to step down from power, **Lázaro Cárdenas** became the next president of Mexico. This ushered in a new era in Mexico as Cárdenas did more than any of the presidents that came before him in enforcing Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917.

Changing Mexican Society

Between 1935-1940 Lázaro Cárdenas attempted to carry out Article 27 to its fullest. Cárdenas was a man who wanted to change the structure of Mexican society. His work brought about the demise of the traditional hacienda system in Mexico.²¹⁷ He redistributed 50 million acres of expropriated land (5-6 million of those acres belonged to U.S. investors), destroyed the landed elite, and created low interest rates so the poor could get loans.

PEMEX

Cárdenas would continue to reshape Mexico in 1938 when he nationalized the entire oil industry in Mexico. On March 18, 1938, Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas signed an order that expropriated the resources of nearly all of the foreign oil companies operating in Mexico. He later created Petroleos Mexicanos or **PEMEX**. PEMEX was a state-owned company that held a **monopoly** over the Mexican oil industry, and banned all foreign oil companies from operating in Mexico.²¹⁸ Today, Mexico is one of the ten largest oil producers in the world.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Meyer, Sherman, and Deeds 456-447.

²¹⁸ <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/MexicanOil>

²¹⁹ <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=mx>

Economic Development in Mexico

World War II

The Mexican Revolution ended with the start of World War II. During World War II, Mexico greatly helped the Allies (the U.S., France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union) win the war. Thanks to the **Bracero Program**, an immigrant labor program, Mexicans would sign a contract to work in the U.S. and then return home. They worked on farms, on railroads, and in factories to produce the raw materials and other goods needed to win the war.

World War II also helped the Mexican economy as it brought increased foreign investment into Mexico. During the war, Mexico exported more than it imported which helped create a large cash reserve that allowed Mexico to industrialize and reduced outside competition. This set the stage for the 1950s and 1960s, or what has become known as the “Mexican Miracle.”

The Mexican Miracle

During the “Mexican Miracle” the **Gross National Product** and the **Gross Domestic Product** both increased at a rate of 10% for two straight decades. Though 10% might seem low, that was an amazing accomplishment for Mexico. The Mexican economy was booming. The Mexican middle class grew and became very similar to the U.S. middle class. However, the lower class did not really benefit from the miracle.

As Mexico continued to industrialize, foreign companies realized that Mexico had a valuable labor force. Soon **maquiladoras**, or partial assembly plants, dotted the U.S.-Mexican border. Companies like General Motors, Coca-Cola, Ford, and Goodyear invested in Mexico and shifted some of their manufacturing south of the border.²²⁰


The decades of the 1950s and 1960s also saw some “Americanization” of Mexico. Mexicans began eating hamburgers and drinking Coke. They now drink the most soft drinks in the world. They discovered and embraced other American things like television and Sears-Roebuck.²²¹


²²⁰ Buchenau, 109.


²²¹ *Ibid.*

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Party Dominance

The Partido Revolucionario Institucional

The political party commonly known as the **PRI** (the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*-Institutional Revolutionary Party) started as the PNR (National Revolutionary Party),²²² changed its name to the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM),²²³ and finally became the PRI.²²⁴ The PRI would rule Mexico, under various names from 1929-2000 for a total of 71 years. That made the PRI the second longest ruling party in the world behind the communist party in the former Soviet Union.²²⁵

The PRI embraced both economic philosophies of **capitalism** and **communism**. Mexico liked the capitalistic economies of places like the United States, but also liked to have the state play a role in industrialization. For example, the state played a major role in creating and running PEMEX.²²⁶

Because the PRI ruled Mexico for so long, to call Mexico a democracy would not necessarily be correct. The PRI was a very heavy-handed political party and it dominated national, local, and state politics. Between the years of 1946-1988 it was an automatic win for the PRI. In fact, the biggest event was unveiling the next presidential candidate under the precedent of *dedazo*.²²⁷

The PRI Begins to Lose Power

In 1968, the PRI killed over 400 protesters right before the Olympics were to be held in Mexico.²²⁸ This showed many that the PRI was becoming too powerful and heavy handed. Thus, by 1988 the PRI started to lose some of its political force.

²²² Buchenau 96.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 101.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

²²⁶ *Ibid.* 106.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

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
The PRI's dominance finally came to an end on July 2, 2000 with the election of **Vicente Fox**. Vicente Fox was a member of the **PAN (*Partido Acción Nacional* or National Action Party)**. His election ended the PRI's 71 years of dominance.²²⁹ The PAN maintained power for another six years (unlike U.S. Presidents, Mexican Presidents serve a six year term) when **Felipe Calderón** of the PAN won the election in 2006. However, in 2012 the PRI regained power with the election of **Enrique Peña Nieto**. The PRI was now back in power, but many Mexicans cried that some sort of conspiracy took place in order to make sure the PAN would not win again.


²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

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A Pact Between Neighbors

The countries of the world realized that they have become more and more integrated as technology has decreased both time and distance. This integration has been termed [globalization](#). More specifically, globalization was a process of international integration through the exchange of ideas and other parts of culture. This has created interdependence of economic and cultural activities throughout the world. The nations of North America—Canada, the U.S., and Mexico—believed that allowing free trade between their borders would be economically beneficial for each country. Thus, they created [NAFTA](#) (North American Free Trade Agreement) in 1994.

The Impact of NAFTA on Mexico

For Mexico, the hope was that NAFTA would boost trade with the U.S. and Canada and bring more jobs to Mexico through the creation of more *maquiladoras* along Mexico's northern border with the United States. The border region did see a boom in the first decade.²³⁰ The number of *maquiladoras* along the border did increase from 1,000 in the 1990 to over 3,000 by the year 2010.

This agreement, however, forced Mexico to revise Article 27 of their Constitution. Mexicans again felt they were selling out to the highest bidder. As a result of NAFTA, the northern part of Mexico boomed but the other portions of the country did not see nearly the positive impact.²³¹

The debate still rages today about whether NAFTA had a positive or a negative impact on Mexico. One thing was for certain, the poor Mexican did not believe it had a positive impact.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 122-123.


²³¹ *Ibid.*, 123.


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HELPFUL HINTS

 [Valuable information](#)

 Key Terms

 Key Individuals

 Other

Chapter

3

Immigration

Push and Pull

People leave a place, usually, for one of two reasons: they were either “pushed” out by something that was happening in their own country, or they were “pulled” to a new location based on the potential for opportunity. Recently, Mexicans were pushed out of Mexico due to lack of quality jobs, unemployment, or some sort of disaster. However, Mexicans were pulled out of Mexico because the United States offered quality jobs, it is extremely close to Mexico, and there was a demand for Mexican labor in the United States. Thus, the pull factors were a greater driving force for Mexicans to migrate to America. However, because many of these Mexicans immigrate illegally, it has created tension along the **2,000 mile long border** between the two nations.

Winners and Losers in Illegal Immigration

Winners in illegal immigration would obviously include the immigrants migrating from Mexico to the United States. Immigrants get better jobs, with better pay, and better working conditions. The U.S. also benefits from this immigration. U.S. employers get cheaper labor which allows American consumers to buy cheaper products. The U.S. government also wins as these immigrants pay taxes but do not seem to collect on things like social security.

The Mexican government also benefits as it sees the U.S. as a safety valve for its unemployed to migrate to the United States. This helped create political and economic stability in Mexico as the nation did not have to deal with labor unions or rebellions. Even the Mexicans who chose to stay in Mexico benefit as their family members who migrated to America send back **remittances**. This was money sent back to Mexico by an immigrant. One person working in America can support four people living in Mexico in this way.

However, there were certainly some negatives to this illegal immigration into the United States. The Mexican government was embarrassed as it cannot provide for their own people. In the U.S., local and state governments feel the economic burden of these immigrants in the form of education and healthcare. Low skilled U.S. workers have seen increased unemployment. The immigrants themselves were sometimes taken advantage of. The United States, post 9/11,

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also viewed the border as a potential entry point for terrorists. Needless to say, the U.S. has spent billions of dollars in an attempt to control the border with Mexico.

Narco-Trafficking

The Supply

The U.S. blamed Mexico for the drug problem as Mexico was the number one shipper of illegal drugs in the world. Mexico was also the number one supplier of marijuana and of heroin. In 2006 alone, 65% of narcotics in the U.S. came across the Mexican border.

The U.S. has focused on stopping the supply of the drugs. It believed that it was easier to stop supply than demand. It has been a very militaristic approach which has not been successful.

The Demand

Mexico blamed the U.S for the drug issue. Mexico believed the demand must be stopped. Mexico argued that if U.S. citizens were not consuming the drugs, there would not be as much of a problem. Roughly speaking, 10% of the U.S. population over 12 has consumed illegal drugs. Overall, 25 million Americans have consumed illegal drugs. In the U.S. alone, over \$15 billion have been made from illegal drugs. Ironically, only 10% of Mexicans are actual consumers of the drugs either being produced or shipped from their country.

Impact of Narco-Trafficking

Ironically, narco-trafficking was good for the Mexican economy. It provided jobs and disposable income which people re-invest into the economy.

However, it leads to extreme and brutal violence, crime, corruption, addiction, and the countless other negatives of drug use. The U.S. government spends \$200 billion a year to deal with narco-trafficking.

Furthermore, the U.S. was not merely a consumer of the drugs, but the U.S. also supplies the weapons the drug cartels use as the cartels purchase their weapons in America—drugs go north, guns go south.

Glossary

Abolish-to put an end to

Acculturate-to assimilate into another culture

Allies-a group or nation that is associated with another for a common cause

Annex- to incorporate into a country

Annul- cancel

Aristocracy-the wealthy and land-owning class of society; their titles were passed on to their children

Asymmetrical- used to describe the relationship between Mexico and the U.S. and how one nation maintains power over the other

Authoritarian- exercising almost complete control over the will of others

Autonomy- independence

Bourbon Reforms- system designed to maximize profit collection, ensure that Mexico demanded Spanish goods, and established a new tax system that would be collected by the Peninsulares

Bullionism- the belief that true wealth consisted of precious metals such as gold and silver

Cahualob-Mayan nobility or the Mayan upper class

Calmècac-Aztec upper class schools

Capital flight- when capital generated in a country leaves that country and is not used to benefit that country

Capitalism- an economic system in which individuals own, produce, and distribute wealth and goods

Capital-wealth, usually land or money, held by a person

Caudillo- a charismatic military leader with a personal following

Causeways-a raised path, usually across water or wet ground

Centralism- the idea that the Mexican government should have a strong central government

Centralists- individuals who believed the Mexican government should have a strong central government

Glossary

Científicos- a circle of positivist advisors that would rise to great political and financial importance during the Porfiriato

Classic Period-The period of Mayan dominance from 250-900 AD

Clientelism- the practice of using family, marriage, and friendship to create important economic and political networks

Coercion- use of force or intimidation to get what one wants

Communism- economic system in which the wealth is controlled by the state

Compromise- an agreement in which both sides agree to give a little to reach a consensus

Congress- the legislative body (makes laws) of a nation

Conquistadors-Spanish conquerors of Mexico led by Fernando Cortés

Coup d'état- a sudden attempt by a small group of people to take over the government

Criollos-People born in Mexico but of Spanish descent

Debt peonage- an individual's pledge that their labor will be used in order to repay their debts

Dedazo- "finger point;" the precedent established of the outgoing president of Mexico choosing his successor

Demean-to lower one's honor or integrity

El Dorado-Legendary city of gold sought by the Conquistadors

Encomendero- conquistadors and their descendants

Encomienda-labor grant given to an Encomendero who was given control over an indigenous community

Expropriate- to take possession of

Federalism- the belief that the nation should maintain a weak central government. Federalists believed that the political strength should be held by the individual states within Mexico

Federalists- believed in the philosophy of federalism

Fixed society-a person cannot move up or down in their social class

Fraud- deception or trickery

Glossary

Globalization- world wide integration and development

Gross Domestic Product-(GDP) measures the total output produced within a country's borders
- whether produced by that country's own local firms or by foreign firms

Gross National Product- (GNP) measures the output generated by a country's enterprises
whether located domestically or abroad

Guerrilla- member of a band of non-regular soldiers that uses hit-and-run tactics to harass the enemy

Guerrilleros- fought in the Mexican Revolution and had no uniforms, no military discipline, lived off the land, and attacked local authorities as well as small military outposts

Haciendas- great agricultural estates held in private hands

Heretic- a person who rejects their faith

Huitzilopochtli- (Hummingbird on the Left)-Aztec god of war and sun who was the Aztec supreme deity

Indigenous-a people native to a particular land

Infrastructure- fundamental facilities that serve a country or city such as transportation and communication systems

Legislative branch- branch of government that contains the congress and makes the nations laws; usually elected by the people

Ley Iglesias- forbade the church from charging high fees for giving sacraments

Ley Juárez- made the military and church stand trial in civil court

Ley Lerdo- cut back on the amount of land the church could own

Lone Star Republic- the nickname of Texas as it became its own nation after achieving independence from Mexico

Macehualtin-largest group of Aztec society which included 90% of the population; included farmers, laborers, craftsmen, servants, and vendors

Maize-corn

Maquiladoras- partial assembly plants along the Mexican-U.S. border

Glossary

Mercantilism- economic system where the purpose of the colony was to make the mother country stronger and more self-sufficient

Mercenary-professional soldier who is hired to fight

Mesoamerica-the era of Central Mexico and parts of Central America where many indigenous tribes lived before the arrival of Europeans

Mestizaje- racial mixing

Mestizos-usually a mix of Spanish and Native blood

Mexicanidad-Criollo celebration of their native culture

Mexicanos-A term that Criollos began calling themselves

Milpa-raised fields where the Maya grew their crops

Monopoly- exclusive control of a service

Mounted-soldiers that are on horseback

NAFTA- North American Free Trade Agreement; trade deal between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico

Nepotism- favoritism on the basis of family relationship

Noche Triste, or “**Night of Sorrow**”- July 1, 1520, Cortès and his men were forced to flee the Aztec capital. Cortès lost 450 men, 4,000 Indian allies, and 46 horses

Nomadic-a people who do not live permanently in one place but move around

Ollama-a game played by the Maya using a rubber ball in which the participants attempted to get the ball through a ring

PEMEX- Petroleos Mexicanos; a state-owned company that held a monopoly over the Mexican oil industry, and banned all foreign oil companies from operating in Mexico.

Peninsulares-people born in Spain but living and ruling Mexico

Peones- the poor common folk of Mexico who usually worked on haciendas

Pipiltin-Aztec nobility; includes the Emperor and the royal family as well as High Priests, military officials, judges, and tax collectors

Plan de Veracruz- Santa Anna’s plan to overthrow Iturbide and declare Mexico a republic

Glossary

Plan of Iguala-the plan designed by Iturbide to overthrow Mexican rule. It contained the Three Guarantees

Pochteca-just below the Pipiltin in Aztec society; included traders, merchants, priests, scholars, artists, and scribes

Positivism- emphasized the economic development of a nation and the building of a strong central state

Precedent-an example set that others will follow

Predetermined-determined beforehand

Regular clergy- missionaries

Remittances- money sent back to Mexico by an immigrant

Repartimiento- a system of forced labor that replaced the encomienda system. Under this system, each adult Indian male had to contribute 45 days of labor a year, usually a week at a time

Republic- a nation in which the citizens vote for representatives to run the nation

Republican- favoring a republic

Rubber stamp- when congress passes laws easily and willfully that are proposed by a leader

Rurales- a group of mounted and heavily armed military guards

Secular clergy- included the priests that served under the bishop

Serfdom-person in condition of servitude

Siege-surrounding a city or fortified location in order to ensure no supplies enter and to weaken its defenders

Smallpox-a highly contagious disease; cause of death for many Native Americans

Surplus-a quantity greater than what is needed

Telpochcallis-Aztec lower class schools

the grito de Dolores-Speech given by Father Hidalgo to inspire the people to rebel against Spain

Treason- act or attempted act to overthrow one's own government

Glossary

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo- treaty between the U.S. and Mexico that brought an end to the Mexican-American War and cost Mexico nearly half its territory

Tribute-an enforced payment

Tyranny- an unjust or severe government or ruler

Yankeephobia- fear of America and its culture