

SPANISH EMPIRE—MEXICO

1520 to 1921

CONQUEST OF CORTEZ TO MEXICAN REVOLUTION

Spanish Mexico and Republican Mexico—The history of Mexico since its conquest by Hernando Cortez in 1520, can be divided into two periods. From 1535 to 1821, Mexico was known as Nueva Espana (New Spain) and it was ruled as a Spanish province, under the direction of a Viceroy. In the early 19th century, Mexico broke its ties with Spain and shortly afterward, the government responsible for declaring Independence was overthrown by a group of Liberals, who declared Mexico should be governed as a republic, rather than a constitutional monarchy. The terms on which the Mexican republic was founded, however, lacked consensus or legitimacy so over a century of Civil Wars followed.

The following summary of Mexican history, including timelines and character lists, is divided into six historical periods, including two major divisions. An outline of the major periods of Mexican history is as follows: All the resources related to Mexico, including Era summaries, character lists, timelines, and reading recommendations are also divided into Spanish and Republican divisions.

SPANISH MEXICO

<u>Conquest of Mexico</u>	1519-1535	Hernando Cortez , Dona Marina
<u>Rule of the Viceroys</u>	1536-1810	Antonio de Mendoza , Juan de Zumarraga , Juan Diego
<u>Independence and Empire</u>	1810-1823	Miguel Hidalgo , Morales , Guerrero , Agustin Iturbide

REPUBLICAN MEXICO

<u>Early Republic</u>	1824-1855	Santa Anna , Farias , Victoria
<u>Reform Period</u>	1855-1911	Alvarez , Benito Juarez , Maximilian of Austria , Porfirio Diaz
<u>Mexican Revolution</u>	1911-1934	Francisco Madero , Venustiano Carranza , Calles , Cardenas

Note: The three periods of Republican history correspond to the three Constitutions of Mexico, enacted in 1824, 1857, and 1917, under which the Mexican Republic has supposedly been governed.

Era Summary—Spanish Mexico

Conquest of Mexico—The conquest of Mexico was accomplished by Hernando Cortez, an ambitious adventurer who sought his fortune in the New World and established his reputation during the conquest of Cuba. In 1518 he was put in charge of organizing an expedition to the mainland, but fell out of favor with the governor of Cuba. Fearing loss of his position, he set forth without permission, landed on the Yucatan and made peace with some of the coastal natives. There he learned details of the fabulous city of the Aztecs. One of the female slaves that in the area, whom Cortez called Dona Marina, spoke both Mayan and Aztec languages and she became his advisor and translator. After burning his boats, Cortez marched on the capital city, vanquishing several hostile tribes *en route*. He also made alliances with natives who were enemies of the Aztecs, including the ferocious Tlaxcalan tribe, who submitted to Cortez only after a decisive battle.

The Spaniards, with their Tlaxcalan allies, marched to Tenochtitlan (Mexico City) unopposed, and soon got the emperor Montezuma under their power. Thus far things had gone well, but they quickly got out of hand. First Cortez had to leave the city to fend off an unfriendly Spanish army

sent by the governor of Cuba. While he was gone, his men attacked a group of Aztec priests, and set the whole city in rebellion. Montezuma died; and the Spaniards scarcely escaped with their lives. Even after this disaster, however, Cortez managed to turn the situation around by making more alliances with native enemies of the Aztec. In a few months he was sufficiently recovered to make another attack on the city, but the Aztecs refused to submit until the entire city was destroyed. For the first several years, Cortez ruled Mexico as governor, and placed much emphasis on converting the natives. As soon as the region was pacified, however, the Spanish king appointed a viceroy, and Cortez was richly rewarded but allowed no further role in government.

Rule of the Viceroys—For three centuries, from 1535 until 1821, the Spanish colony of "New Spain" was ruled by Viceroys. The first two Spanish viceroys, who each served for over 15 years, were Antonio de Mendoza and Luis de Velasco. In an age of rapine greed, cruelty, and conquest, they exemplified the best of Spanish character and laid a solid foundation for the government of Mexico. Their treatment of the natives was as just as possible under the circumstances and many submitted to Spanish rule peacefully. Velasco, especially, was noted for protecting the Indians and freeing thousands from slavery in the mines. The early Viceroys were helped in their efforts by a multitude of monks and missionaries who built schools, converted the Indians to Christianity, and helped protect them from the abuses of Spanish adventurers and *encomenderos* (Spanish landholders).

In 1542 Charles V promulgated the "New Laws of the Indies" aimed at assuring fair treatment of the natives, but when the Viceroy of Peru attempted to enforce them, he was murdered by irate landowners. Likewise, the Church's official teachings on the treatment of the Indians was invariably charitable, but not always heeded. The racial caste system in Spanish America was another complicating factor, since and there was an influential population of mestizo, or mixed-race citizens, who were often more oppressive of lower-caste Indians than pure-European Spaniards. It is fair to generalize that some of the natives were treated badly, but many others were content to live as Christian peasants and the worst offenses against them were usually the result of local abuses, not official government or Church policy.

During the first two hundred years of Spanish rule in Mexico, the Hapsburg kings permitted a great deal of local autonomy and regional ruled government offices were frequently under the control of native born creoles. It was not until the 18th century, under the Bourbons, that an attempt was made to centralize power in the hands of the Spanish king by making all important offices in New Spain, including those which benefitted from access to trading monopolies, available only to Spanish born officers. This policy created a rift between Spanish born *peninsulares* and native born *creoles* and inspired many men from the Mexican upper classes to favor independence and join secret political societies.

The Spanish Empire in the new world was far-flung and sparsely populated. Spanish rule was confined mostly to highly populated areas and although vast tracts of North America were claimed by Spain, little was done to develop the northern regions until the 18th century. For many years North American Indians traded with the Spaniards but were not ruled by them. Junipero Serra was a Franciscan monk whose work building missions along the coast of California was especially noteworthy, but as late as 1846, at the opening of the Mexican American War, the Spanish presence in all of the American southwest was very limited.

Independence and Empire—At the turn of the 19th century, the idea of Mexican independence was only entertained by a small, intellectual class of liberals, centered mainly in Freemason lodges. In 1808, however, the Spanish king was deposed by Napoleon, and all of Spain rose in

rebellion. The Spanish people refused to acknowledge the illegitimate government and wage a guerilla war against France, leaving the government of the American colonies in confusion. The crisis in Spain provided an opportunity for Mexican revolutionaries to make a strike for independence while the mother country was in disarray. In Mexico, the first outbreak, known as "Grito de Dolores" was led by Miguel Hidalgo, an apostate priest associated with Freemasonry. He was captured and executed for treason, but the Mexican revolutionaries, backed by a strange mix of liberals, soldiers, peasants, and aristocrats, continued to press for independence until Ferdinand VII was restored to the throne of Spain.

Once the Spanish king was back on the, the Independence movement in Mexico faltered, but in 1820 Ferdinand was again overthrown by a liberal coup d'etat. At that point, conservatives and monarchists began to see independence as a means of preserving Mexico from the chaos and anti-Catholic policies of the Spanish liberal regime. Agustin Iturbide, the leader of the Spanish army in Mexico had been fighting revolutionaries for ten years, but after the overthrow of King Ferdinand he feared that Mexico would come under the influence of the Spanish Liberal Republicans. He saw independence was the best way of preserving the status quo so he made an alliance with the revolutionary leader Vincente Guerrero to break Mexico's ties with Spain.

Iturbide made himself emperor, but since he had no children, his real purpose was to maintain the principle of monarchy and hold open the position for Ferdinand VII or his descendants. The revolutionaries, on the other hand, wanted power in their own hands and had only agreed to support Iturbide as a temporary strategy. They rebelled against the emperor at the first opportunity and sent him into exile in Europe, assuring him he would be charged with treason if he returned. The revolutionary leaders appointed themselves heads of state and set about writing a 'Federal' Constitution, favored by their co-conspirators in the United States, that granted a great deal of independence to the states and preserved very little power for the central government.

Soon after the Republican takeover of Mexico's government, the Liberal regime in Spain was toppled, and Ferdinand VII reclaimed the throne. The United States, however, had a vested interest in preventing Spain from reclaiming Mexico, and promulgated the Monroe Doctrine, which forbid European "interference" with the newly independent American Republics. The decree had nothing to do with promoting Mexican self-government, but was instead motivated by the desire of American and English financial interests to keep access to the markets of Latin America open to them at exactly the time that popular feeling in the newly liberated countries tended to favor a return to their traditional form of government.

Timeline—Spanish Mexico

AZTEC EMPIRE

- 1200 Rise of Aztec nation in the Central Valley of Mexico.
- 1440 Montezuma I ascends to the Aztec throne.
- 1502 [Montezuma II](#) ascends to the Aztec throne.
- 1521 [Hernando Cortez](#) conquers the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan.
- 1585 Franciscan Missionary publishes *Florentine Codex*: history of the Aztecs.

VICEROYALTY OF NEW SPAIN

- 1531 Our Lady of Guadalupe appears to St. Juan Diego
- 1535-50 Rule of first Viceroy to New Spain, [Antonio de Mendoza](#)
- 1540-42 Explorations of [Francisco de Coronado](#) in American Southwest.
- 1768 Jesuits expelled from Mexico, leaving Baja missions unattended.
- 1769 [Junipero Serra](#) founds over a dozen missions in California.

MEXICAN INDEPENDENCE

- 1808 Overthrow of Spanish king by Napoleon leads to Peninsular War in Spain.
- 1810 [Miguel Hidalgo](#) leads revolt, seeks independence from Napoleonic Spain.
- 1814 Restoration of Bourbon king in Spain leads to lull in independence movement.
- 1822-23 [Agustin Iturbide](#) proclaimed emperor, then overthrown by republican conspirators.

Recommended Reading—Spanish Mexico

CORE READING ASSIGNMENTS

- Noll - [A Short History of Mexico](#) [Aboriginal Mexico](#) to [The Regency and Empire](#) (7)
- Banks - [The Boys'](#) Prescott *entire book*
- Ober - [Young Folks' History of Mexico](#) [The Discovery of Mexico](#) to [The Great Revolution](#) (17)

SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Winlow - [Our Aztec Cousin of Long Ago](#) *entire book*
- Duncan - [Mexico](#) *entire book*
- Morris - [The Story of Mexico](#) [Cortes Conquers Aztecs](#) to [Rule of Spanish Viceroys](#) (2)
- Ober - [Hernando Cortes Conqueror of Mexico](#) *entire book*

Characters—Spanish Mexico

CONQUEST OF MEXICO

<u>Montezuma</u>	1466– 1520	Ruler of the Aztec empire at the time of the Spanish conquest. Captured by the Spanish and killed during revolt.
<u>Dona Marina</u>	1496– 1529	Indian slave woman who acted as consort, advisor, and translator for Cortez during his conquest of Mexico.
<u>Hernando Cortez</u>	1485– 1540	Conquistador who landed in Mexico with a small army, and allied with local tribes, conquered the Empire of the Aztecs.

VICEROYALTY

<u>Antonio de Mendoza</u>	1495– 1552	First Viceroy of New Spain, competent and kind to natives. Laid the groundwork for Spanish dominion over Mexico.
<u>Juan Diego</u>	1474– 1548	Mexican native who saw an apparition of Our Lady and whose cloak was impressed with an image of the blessed virgin.
<u>Bartholomew de las Casas</u>	1484– 1566	Priest who accompanied the Spanish conquistadors to the New World and tried to protect the native inhabitants from abuses and maltreatment.
<u>Juan de Zumarraga</u>	1468– 1548	First Archbishop of Mexico. Strove to protect the Indians from vicious and exploitive conquistadors.
<u>Junipero Serra</u>	1713– 1784	Franciscan Friar who founded over a dozen missions along the coast of California.

MEXICAN INDEPENDENCE

<u>Miguel Hidalgo</u>	1753– 1811	Freemason Priest who was a leader of Mexico's war of independence. Famous for !Grito de dolores!
<u>Agustin Iturbide</u>	1783– 1824	Spanish General who changed sides and supported Mexican independence. Later made himself emperor.
Vincente Guerrero	1782- 1831	Leader of Revolutionary liberals. Worked with Iturbide for Mexican independence, then rebelled against him. Seized office of President after political rival was elected.
Jose Maria Morelos	1765- 1815	Revolutionary Priest, led independence movement after the death of Hidalgo, Caught and executed for treason!

Era Summary—Republican Mexico

The Early Mexican Republic (1824 to 1855)—The first thirty years of Republican government in Mexico was utterly chaotic. (Actually, the entire history of Republican Mexico is chaotic, with the sole exception of the rule of Porfirio Diaz 1876-1911, but we'll start with the first 30 years.) The constitution of 1824 granted the central government very little power and the President was entirely subject to congress. But even the congress had limited powers because its leaders were subject to the machinations of the military who could sometimes bring down a government without firing a shot, just by issuing a pronunciamiento. This explains why there were over twenty five-different Presidents of Mexico during its first three decades, only two of whom served out their full four years terms.

The individual states in Mexico were granted so much independence by the Constitution of 1824 that local leaders could rule as they wanted without regard to national laws or a central judicial system that could reign in abuses. This allowed local leaders to pass laws favorable to themselves and unfavorable to their political rivals. This division of power was intentional, since the Freemasons who crafted the Constitution of 1824 did not want a strong central government that could reign in regional corruption or protect Mexican territory in the north from Annexation by the United States. Much of the mischief done in the early years of the republic was done by regional rulers and included abuses such as expelling Spanish citizens from Mexico and confiscating their property, taking foreign out loans, interfering in Church affairs, redirecting tithes to government coffers, looting churches, raising local taxes, and tolerating slavery.

After ten years there was a conservative reaction to the abuses of local governments and conservatives altered the constitution to strengthen the presidency and make regional governments subject to national laws. The changes were strongly opposed by several outlying states, most notably Texas, which declared its independence, and defeated a Mexican army led by Santa Anna at the battle of San Jacinto. Unfortunately, the changes to the constitution did little to increase stability, and Mexico's influence over its sparsely populated northern territories weakened since the central government had few resources to invest in defense or colonization. The United States was, of course, always ready to take advantage of its weakened southern neighbor and in 1846, President Polk ordered American troops into a disputed region between Texas and Mexico in order to provoke a conflict. As soon as Mexican troops fired a shot, Americans soldiers quickly occupied all of the territory they hoped to win from the Mexicans. Although the United States defeated all of the forces sent against in Northern Mexico, the Americans were unable to get any Mexican statesmen to cede territory or sign a peace agreement until a naval force was dispatched to Vera Cruz, and an American army occupied Mexico city.

The Reform Era (1855 to 1911)—The disastrous loss of territory, and devastating costs of the Mexican American war doomed the government and eventually led to the overthrow of Santa Anna, a general who had held the office of Presidency eleven times and taken part in every conflict since from the War of Independence to the Mexican-American War. The divisive political sects in the country, which had caused so much turmoil in the first few years of Mexican history, worsened after the conflict with America.

A new twist in the ongoing conflict between conservatives and liberals in Mexico developed in 1855 when Benito Juarez and his henchman issued the "Plan of Ayulta", deposed Santa Anna, oversaw the writing of the Constitution of 1857, and ordered a new round of confiscations directed against the Catholic Church. The anti-Clerical measures in the new constitution were so intolerable that even the liberal President resigned rather than enforce them, and the Reform War broke out in

earnest. The United States unofficially intervened on the side of Juarez and his liberals but withdrew its support during the American Civil War.

The crisis eventually led to the occupation of Mexico by French soldiers, invited by the conservative faction which sought to restore a Christian monarchy by placing a Habsburg on the throne of Mexico. The reign of Emperor Maximilian lasted only three years, since he proved too liberal for the conservatives and too conservative for the liberals. He was deposed and executed in 1867 after the French army withdrew and for a brief time following, Juarez led a liberal government under the terms of the Constitution of 1857.

Unfortunately, the bitter animosity between rival political factions was so great following the Reform War that the government was always on the brink of crisis. In 1876, Porfirio Diaz, a popular general who was respected by both liberals and conservatives was elected president. Although he stepped down briefly after his first term was over, it soon became apparent that he was the only man who could hold the country together, so he was re-elected in 1884, and from that point on reigned as a virtual dictator until 1911.

Diaz was liberal but pragmatic, and did not share the anti-Catholic biases of many of the other "reformers". He kept oppressive anti-Clerical laws on the books, but did not enforce them, so for the first time in 50 years, the Church enjoyed a degree of liberty and prosperity. His first priority was to keep order, so he allowed liberty of opinion, but crushed rebellion. Diaz sought alliances with both liberal businessmen and conservative land-owners, and got along with both Catholics and Freemasons. He welcomed foreign investment, reformed the army and made great improvements in infrastructure, but he made no serious attempt at land reform, and permitted corruption, cronyism, and exploitation of landless peons. The 35 year reign of Porfirio Diaz was certainly the most peaceful and prosperous era since the dawn of the Republic, but such tranquility did not long survive the death of the "dictator".

The Mexican Revolution (1911 to 1934)—Diaz enjoyed a great deal of popular support at the beginning of his reign, but by the early 1900's there was widespread opposition. He decided to retire in 1910 and hold free elections, reneged and was accused of voter fraud. His various opponents, who had been plotting to assume power rose in rebellion and the elderly Diaz was forced to flee to France. This was the beginning of the Mexican Revolution. In the following years, leadership of Mexico changed hands several times, between 'Federalist' supporter of the old Regime and his 'Constitutionalist' opponents. Eventually, however, the government fell into the hands of Carranza, a governor and leader of the 'Constitutionalist' army.

From the beginning the 'Constitutionalist' enemies of Diaz were united in their desire to overthrow him, they had conflicting ideas of the type of government that should replace it. Some of the most famous Revolutionary generals, such as Pancho Villa, and Emiliano Zapata, were radicals. Carranza (by revolutionary standards) was moderate, but the Constitution he proposed in 1917, was strongly anti-clerical. The purpose of taking such a strong stand against the Catholic Church, of course, was to provide a basis for the wholesale confiscation of Church property by the new government. The anti-Catholic provisions were so severe and unpopular that the Cristeros broke out a few years later. After five more years of fighting it was resolved that the government would not enforce all of its anti-Catholic laws.

From the late 1920's until the mid-1980's, Mexico was run as a single party system. The PRI was corrupt and engaged in blatant voter fraud, but at least it avoided civil war. Only in the last two decades has Mexico developed a genuine multiple-party system.

Characters—Republican Mexico

EARLY REPUBLIC

Santa Anna	1794–1876	Fought for Mexican independence and against Texas, then served as president on and off, over twenty turbulent years.
Valentin Farias	1781-1858	Liberal anti-Clerical President in alliance with Santa Anna during the early years of the Mexican republic who imposed many "reforms" targeting the Church.

REFORM ERA

Benito Juarez	1806–1872	Leader of Mexico during the War of Reform. Passed, enforced anti-clerical laws. Supported informally by United States.
Juan Alvarez	1790-1867	Regional warlord in alliance with Juarez. Entered Mexico city in 1855 with militia, terrorized the population, made himself president, and appointed his successor.
Maximilian of Austria	1832–1867	Archduke who was proclaimed Emperor of Mexico. Overthrown and executed by Liberal republicans.
Porfirio Diaz	1830–1915	President of Mexico for 35 years. Brought stability, modernization, and foreign capital, but ruled as a dictator.

MEXICAN REVOLUTION

Francisco Madero	1873–1913	Wealthy, liberal reformer who opposed the dictatorship of Diaz. Elected president but assassinated in office.
Emiliano Zapata	1879–1919	Leader of a Rebel band of southern outlaws during Mexican Revolution. Opposed both Huerta and Carranza.
Venustiano Carranza	1859–1920	Constitutionalist leader of Mexican revolution. Served as president after overthrew Huerta until his assassination in 1920.
Victoriana Huerta	1859–1920	Diaz supporter who overthrew President Madero and assumed dictatorial power during Mexican Revolution.
Pancho Villa	1878–1923	Rebel leader of the constitutionalist army in northern Mexico. Governor of Chihuahua. Broke with Carranza.
Plutarco Calles	1877-1945	Violently anti-Catholic President of Mexico who enforced harsh suppression of the Church in Mexico and incited the Cristero War.

Recommended Reading—Republican Mexico

CORE READING ASSIGNMENTS

Noll - A Short History of Mexico	Revolt of Texas to Diaz and Mexico Today (7)
Ober - Young Folks' History of Mexico	Mexico Still Struggling to End of Aztec Empire (7)

SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Perkins - The Mexican Twins	<i>entire book</i>
Upton - Table of Contents	<i>entire book</i>
Morris - Historical Tales: Spanish American	Conquest New Mexico to Hobson Merrimac (6)
Noll - From Empire to Republic	<i>entire book</i>
Morris - The Story of Mexico	Winning Freedom to Nations Seek Mediation (14)
- High Lights of the Mexican Revolution	<i>entire book</i>

Timeline—Republican Mexico

EARLY REPUBLIC

- 1824 Republicans enact 'Federal' constitution of 1824, Guadalupe Victoria elected President.
- 1827 Spanish *peninsulares* and prominent monarchists expelled from Mexico.
- 1829 Vicente Guerrero forces resignation of rival president-elect, seizes control of government .
- 1829-33 Government falls into chaos, presidency changes hands nine times during second term.
- 1833 [Santa Anna](#) gains control of presidency, enacts 'Seven Laws' to strengthen government.
- 1836 Texas declares its independence from Mexico, defeats at *Battle of San Jacinto*.
- 1846-48 [Mexican American War](#). Mexico forced to cede northern provinces to the United States.

REFORM ERA

- 1855 Juarez and Alvarez organize 'Plan of Ayulta': Liberal overthrow of government.
- 1857 Liberals enact 'Constitution of 1857' including controversial anti-clerical measures.
- 1857-61 United States intervenes in 'War of Reform' on behalf of liberals.
- 1861 [Benito Juarez](#) elected President, cancels payment on national debt.
- 1862 French Intervention on behalf of conservatives, installs Maximilian I as Emperor of Mexico.
- 1867 [Maximilian of Austria](#) is tried for treason and shot. Juarez returns to power.
- 1876-1911 Reign of [Porfirio Diaz](#); Mexico stable and at peace under autocratic leaders.

MEXICAN REVOLUTION

- 1910 Diaz legalizes political parties, allows opposition to run for President, then rigs election.
- 1911 [Francisco Madero](#), backed by "Constitutionalist party" overthrows Diaz.
- 1913 [Victoriana Huerta](#), leader of "Federalist party" and ally of Diaz.
- 1914 Carranza, constitutionalist leader, overthrows Huerta with help of U.S. Navy.
- 1917 Liberal constitution of 1917 is so anti-clerical, even Carranza refuses to enforce.
- 1924 Atheist Plutarco Calles elected president, brutally enforce anti-Clerical laws.
- 1926-29 Cristero War: Catholics revolt against brutal oppressions of priests and Church closings.
- 1929 Calles forms of PRI (Mexican National Party)