



— Mexico after the Independence —

The **War of Independence** cost Mexico a great deal. After gaining independence in 1821, the country was left in a poor state. Agricultural, mining and industrial production had fallen during the war, and over half a million Mexicans had died.



As a new country, Mexico was struggling internally to achieve nationhood. The transformation from a colony to a self-governing country was slow and sometimes difficult.

During the next 30 years, Mexico had 50 governments, almost all the result of military coups and eleven of them presided over by **General Santa Anna**. This was a century of strife and great change. Politically, Mexico was deeply divided between two groups: the Liberals and the Conservatives, each wanting to rule Mexico in a different way.

The **Conservatives** proposed to use the old Spanish model to govern Mexico, but the **Liberals** wanted a system similar to the United States. Conservatives and Liberals disagreed over education, work, system of government, the influence of the Church, the army; in fact over almost everything!

Agustín de Iturbide

Agustín de Iturbide was the first Emperor of independent Mexico. He had fought during the War of Independence, leading Mexicans to victory and independence from Spain. The Conservatives wanted Mexico to become an Empire after independence, and Iturbide was crowned Emperor in 1822.

Iturbide ruled for less than one year. He was removed from power by Santa Anna, and was exiled to Britain. In 1824, Iturbide returned to Mexico but was arrested and shot. After a lot of turmoil,



General Antonio López de Santa Anna was elected President of Mexico.

General Antonio López de Santa Anna

During General Santa Anna's time as President, war broke out with Mexico's neighbour to the north, the United States. After the Independence, Mexico became the largest country in Spanish America. Meanwhile, the United States was looking to expand its own territory and become more powerful. To achieve this aim, some American families who had settled in Texas were encouraged by the United States government to claim **Texas as an independent state** from Mexico, which happened in 1836.



The Mexican government, far away in Mexico City, could not extend its rule effectively to the furthest corners of Mexico. In 1845, the USA admitted the independent state of Texas into the Union, despite warnings from the Mexican government that to do so would mean war. The conflict began in 1846, when the US army began its march south toward Mexico City.

Once in the capital, the U.S. won a series of battles. The final battle was fought in **Chapultepec Castle**, where some young cadets defended the military academy. They carried on fighting bravely until they were all killed, and are still commemorated today as the "*Niños Héroes*".



The United States flag was raised over the National Palace and the defeated Mexican government established itself in Queretaro. In 1848, Santa Anna was forced to sign a treaty, selling for \$15 million dollars more than half of the Mexican territory — including part or all of present day **Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, Utah, Texas, New Mexico** and **California** states. Santa Anna became very unpopular and lost power. Eventually he was forced into exile.

Benito Juárez

In 1857, a new Constitution was written, establishing a Federal Republic, just as the Liberals wanted. In 1858, **Benito Juárez**, the bright son of Zapotec descendants from Oaxaca and a lawyer, became President. In the same year, a civil war called the **War of Reform** broke out between the Liberals and the Conservatives.



Juárez had passed a set of laws called the **Reform Laws**, which made all Church land and buildings the property of the State. This cut the power and influence of the Church, which had been very powerful until then. The civil war lasted 3 years. Juárez later had to leave the country but returned for a further 10 year term as President.

The french Intervention

The war against the United States and the three years of civil war (War of Reform) left Mexico very weak. By 1861, Benito Juárez decided that Mexico was too poor to pay back its debts to Spain, England and France. When Mexico stopped paying, **the European countries** sent a joint army to Mexico to get their payment back.



After some negotiations Spain and England decided to leave, but France decided to stay and seize the opportunity to impose a monarchy in Mexico. The timing was perfect, because the United States was in the middle of its Civil War, and they could not help the Liberals. The French troops landed in Veracruz between

December 1861 and January 1862 and continued to the capital. On **May 5th**, 1862, the majority of the Mexican people united against the French and defeated them in the **Battalla de Puebla**.

However, the Liberal army was later destroyed and the French took possession of the capital. Benito Juárez had no choice but to leave the city and establish his government in the north of Mexico, a step away from the United States border.

Emperor Maximilian



Two years after the army invasion, **Archduke Maximilian of Habsburg** was proclaimed Emperor of Mexico, with Napoleon's support. At the end of the Civil War, the French army returned to France, leaving the new Emperor alone.

Maximilian could not hold out against the Liberals and he surrendered in 1867 and was executed after just three years as Emperor.



Benito Juárez restored the Republic and governed until his death in 1872.

El Porfiriato

Porfirio Díaz was one of the generals on the Liberal army, who fought against Maximilian. He was President from 1877 until 1911, a 30 year long period known as the **Porfiriato**, because the figure of Porfirio Díaz dominated it. During this period, the economy grew; new railways and telephone networks were built; new banks opened; industry, mining, agriculture and commerce expanded.



Although President Díaz brought many benefits to Mexico, he was a dictator - a President who abused his power. Under Díaz, a few land owners became very wealthy, but the majority of Mexicans remained poor.

During the first years of the 20th century, a new generation of educated, young Mexicans that did not belong to Díaz' group demanded a change. For the first time in thirty-three years other political parties were formed. In **1910**, Diaz's promised them free elections but at the end of the day, he was declared the winner of yet another election.

The Revolution

Francisco I. Madero was one of those who had organised a political

party. After the election he led the revolt against Diaz ,who eventually resigned and was exiled to France.

Elections were then held, and Madero won the Presidency, but the people were impatient and Madero was incapable of bringing order to the country. After a coup, he was executed and another general, **Victoriano Huerta** took over as President.



The revolutionaries, including **Francisco Villa** in the north and **Emiliano Zapata** in the south, began a struggle to overthrow President Huerta. After a few years of turmoil, **Venustiano Carranza** assumed power.

The Constitution of 1917

Under Carranza's presidency a new Constitution was adopted in 1917. The new Constitution took into account individual and social rights, particularly to protect the workers and the peasants, and was very nationalistic. **This is the Constitution by which Mexico is governed today.**

Nationalisation of Oil

A most significant political development in Mexico since the Revolution came with the election of General **Lázaro Cardenas** as president in 1934. His government carried out considerable land reform, he reorganized labour, and, most significant of all, he nationalized the oil industry.

