

The Mexican Revolution

The Mexican Revolution was brought on by a tremendous disagreement among the Mexican people over the dictatorship of President Porfirio Diaz. Diaz stayed in office for thirty one years. During that span, power was concentrated in the hands of a select few; the people had no power to express their opinions or select their public officials. Wealth was concentrated in the hands of the few, and injustice was everywhere, in the cities and the countryside alike.

Early in the 20th Century, a new generation of young leaders arose who wanted to participate in the political life of their country, but they were denied the opportunity by the officials who were already in power. This group of young leaders believed that they could assume a role in Mexican politics once President Diaz announced publicly that Mexico was ready for democracy. Although the Mexican Constitution called for public election and other institutions of democracy, Diaz and his supporters used their political and economic resources to stay in power indefinitely.

Francisco I. Madero was one of the strongest believers that President Diaz should renounce his power and not seek re-election. Together with other young reformers, Madero created a new political party, which he represented in presidential elections. Madero was a supporter of democracy and he wanted to make the government follow the law. The success of Madero's movement made him a threat in the eyes of President Diaz. Shortly before the elections of 1910, Madero was captured and imprisoned. Learning of Diaz's re-election, Madero fled to the United States in October of 1910. In exile, he issued the "Plan of San Luis," a manifesto which declared that the elections had been a fraud and that he would not recognize Porfirio Diaz as the legitimate President of the Republic.

Instead, Madero made the daring move of declaring himself President Pro-Temp until new elections could be held. Madero promised to return all land which had been confiscated from the peasants, and he called for universal voting rights and for a limit of one term for the president. Madero's call for an uprising on November 20th, 1910, marked the beginning of the Mexican Revolution.

In Chihuahua, Mexico Madero was able to persuade Francisco "Poncho" Villa to join the revolution. Though he had no military experience, Villa proved to be excellent strategist, and he earned the allegiance of the people of northern Mexico. In March of 1911, Emiliano Zapata, another local revolutionary led an uprising of the peasants. At the same time, armed revolt began in many other parts of the country. These revolts, and the national anger which inspired them, defeated the army of Diaz within six months. The decisive victory of the Mexican Revolution led Porfirio Diaz to resign as President and he fled to exile in France, where he died in 1915. With the collapse of the Diaz regime, the Mexican Congress called for national popular elections, which resulted in the victory of Francisco I. Madero as President.

1. Who was Porfirio Diaz?
2. Why were the Mexican people unhappy?
3. Who was Francisco Madero?
4. How did the Mexican Revolution start?

5. Who are Poncho Villa and Emiliano Zapata?

6. How did the revolution end?

In 1911, counterrevolutionary revolts crushed under General Victoriano Huerta. This led to a dependency on the disloyal army. In 1913, Madero was overthrown and killed, along with vice president, in a coup d'état headed by the army's commander-in-chief, the same General Victoriano Huerta.

With Madero dead, Huerta seized power. This seizure of power was supported by the wealthy aristocracy, who saw this as an effort to restore the Diaz system. Local leaders redirected their efforts, this time fighting against the new government and accusing Huerta of plotting Madero's murder in cahoots with the U. S ambassador. Leaders such as Villa, Zapata, Carranza and Obregón led the fighting against Huerta. Pressure from the United States combined with the assaults of the rebels, eventually led to the fall of Huerta.

In an attempt to restrain the slaughter, the governor of the northern state, Venustiano Carranza, formed the Constitutional Army to create a new constitution. He managed to create the Constitution of 1917. The Constitution addressed foreign ownership of resources, an organized labor code, the role of the Roman Catholic Church in education and land reform. Education itself was to be free and without religious involvement. One other important clause was one that protected the rights of the workers, giving them the right to strike and eight hour work days.

The Carranza government also did not last or enforce many of the reforms in the Constitution of 1917. In 1920, General Álvaro Obregón, who had served as Minister of War and of the Navy, revolted against him along with two other leading generals. Carranza was assassinated on May 21, 1920; Carranza had already had Zapata killed in an ambush in 1919.

Obregón assumed power and by bringing peace to the country proved to be not only a capable military man, but also an able politician. Under Obregón's control, an artistic and creative renaissance took place in Mexico: mural and fresco techniques from Pre-Columbian cultures were revived and honored. He was responsible for the creation of a number of unions. Obregón sought reelection in 1928, an illegal act under the Constitution of 1917, and was in fact reelected, but was assassinated by a Catholic extremist before taking office.

1. How did Huerta take control of the government? How did the Huerta government fall?
2. Who was Venustiano Carranza?
3. Why was the creation of a constitution important to Mexico?
4. What are some things that the constitution granted?