United Mexican States

Introduction and Political History

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Agriculture and Cities

• Human migration into **Valley of Mexico** ca. 8,000 BCE
  • Transition to **sedentary agriculture** ca. 5000 BCE
• Domestication of: **corn** (maize), tomatoes, beans
  • Development of **religious traditions**, **population density**, and **social hierarchy**
• Earliest major civilization → **Olmecs**
  • Difficulties determining political organization, evident **social (political?) stratification**, possible **decentralization**?
Major Pre-Contact Political Entities

• **Teotihuacán** (100 BCE to 650 CE)
  - Large, culturally diverse city-state
  - Little understood re: political structure, economics, or collapse

• **Mayan city-states** (200 BCE to 900 CE)
  - Individual city-states constructed along trade routes, often very distant from other city-states, frequent conflict over resources
  - Connection between religious and political elite, strong social hierarchy

• **Aztec Empire** (1428 to 1521 CE)
  - “Triple Alliance” between three major city-states
  - Somewhat decentralized system, with provincial and clan leaders in control of day-to-day life
Collapse of the Aztec Empire

- Spanish arrival (Hernán Cortés) in 1519 CE
  - Aztec Empire already weakened by: disease outbreaks, internal revolts
  - Great Speaker died in 1520, Spanish conquest in 1521 CE

- American demographic collapse
  - Disease (“The Great Dying”) → 80 to 95% in first 150 years?
  - Violence → war, labor systems
Rise of New Spain

• Use of **existing** political & social order
  • **State legibility** → grid plans, hierarchy

• **Council of the Indies**
  • Direct authority over Spanish colonies
  • Limited attempts at **self-governance**

• Racial & ethnic hierarchy and power
  • "**Sistema de castas**" correlation to political authority
  • **Paternalism** in labor & social systems (encomiendas, etc.)
Castas and Revolution

• Effect of casta on political & economic opportunities
  • Peninsular v. criollo, peninsular & criollo v. mestizo & indigenous

• Napoleonic Wars → potential liberalism in Spain
  • Increased rights for mestizos & indigenous?
  • Criollos want independence to PRESERVE privilege

• War for Independence (1810 to 1821 CE)
  • Two competing ideas: independence & liberalism (mestizos & indigenous), independence & conservatism (criollos)
Independence and the Porfiriato

1821 to 1910 CE
Status Quo and Strongmen

• **Removal of peninsulares** with independence
  • *Criollos* = new political & economic elite
  • *Mestizos* & indigenous still out of power

• Political disputes: establish a new **monarchy**? Or a **US-style democracy**?
  • Local politics dominate → **caciques**
  • *Iturbide* crowned emperor in 1822, deposed and executed by Santa Ana in 1824

• **Santa Anna** = **caudillo**
  • Military strongman, but unable to control caciques
Imperialism and Rebellion

• Lack of central authority & state legitimacy → multiple 19th wars & rebellions
  • Secession of Texas (1836)
  • Mexican-American War (1846-48)
  • Caste War of the Yucatán (1847-1901)

• Role of U.S. imperialism & Manifest Destiny
Juarez and *La Reforma*

- **Benito Juarez**, lawyer/judge → president 3 times
  - Indigenous (Zapotec), passed the *Juarez Law* (1855) which declared *all citizens equal before the law*, limited Church courts

- **La Reforma** = liberal policies on economic, political, & social reform
  - Limited the power of the Church and military
  - *Constitution of 1857* → no corporation may own land (Church), civil marriage, public education

- Conservatives object → *Reform War* (1857-1860)
  - Political & economic disorganization prompt “*French Intervention*” (1861) → Brief installation of Maximillian I as emperor of Mexico