

Summary: The Roots of Modern Mexico

The Founding of New Spain

In 1519, Hernán Cortés arrived in Mexico to claim land for Spain. The Aztec king, Montezuma II, welcomed Cortés to the capital, Tenochtitlán. Cortés made Montezuma II his prisoner. Other Aztec leaders drove the Spanish from the city. During the fighting, Montezuma II was killed. Some Native Americans wanted freedom from Aztec rule. They helped the Spanish regain control of Tenochtitlán. The Spanish had advanced weapons, which helped them defeat the Aztec.

The fall of Tenochtitlán in 1521 marked the end of the Aztec Empire and the start of Spanish rule in Mexico. The Spanish called their empire “New Spain.” They built their capital, Mexico City, on the site of Tenochtitlán.

Changes in Mexico

New Spain was made up of different society layers, or classes. The ruling class of New Spain was made up of government officials called *peninsulares*. A second class was made up of the *criollos*. The third class was made up of *mestizos*, who were of Spanish and Native American ancestry. A fourth class was made up of enslaved Africans brought to New Spain. Native Americans were the largest population group in New Spain. However, they had no power. Under the *encomienda* system, Spanish men controlled Native American villages.

Many Mexican leaders were influenced by the writings of earlier Europeans and Americans. They thought that people should be free to choose their own government. In 1810, Father Miguel Hidalgo gave a speech called the *Grito de Dolores* urging people to throw off Spanish rule. He led his followers to Mexico City. They were defeated, and Father Hidalgo was executed. New leaders joined the fight for independence. In 1821 Mexico became independent. Texas gained independence from Mexico in 1836. The United States and Mexico could not agree where the border of Texas should be. They went to war. Mexico had to sign a treaty, which gave part of its land to the United States.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

peninsular *noun*, a ruling class of Mexican officials born in Spain

criollo *noun*, a person born in Mexico whose parents were born in Spain

mestizo *noun*, a person of mixed Spanish and Native American ancestry

encomienda *noun*, a system in which Spaniards governed Native American villages and received tribute

After You Read

REVIEW Why did some Native Americans help the Spanish fight the Aztec? Highlight the sentence that explains why some Native Americans helped the Spanish.

REVIEW What effect did the *Grito de Dolores* have on the Mexican struggle for independence? Circle the sentences that tell about the purpose and result of the *Grito de Dolores*.

REVIEW What ideas from other parts of the world did Mexicans agree with? Draw a box around the sentences that tell what influenced Mexicans' ideas about independence.