

# The Roots of Modern Mexico

## TERMS & NAMES

*peninsular*

*criollo*

*mestizo*

*encomienda*

Father Miguel Hidalgo

Treaty of Guadalupe  
Hidalgo

Gadsden Purchase

## MAIN IDEA

Modern Mexico arose from conflict and cooperation among Native American, African, and Spanish Mexicans.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The culture of Mexico today reflects the influences of and interactions among these groups.

## DATELINE

EXTRA

### TENOCHTITLÁN, AZTEC EMPIRE, 1519

Today, in the palace of the Aztec emperor Montezuma II, a Spanish explorer got a taste of something he is sure to remember. A treat enjoyed by both the Aztec and Maya, the drink, called *chocolatl*, is thick, smooth, and decidedly bitter. With no sugar added to sweeten it, this unusual drink is spiced with flavors such as chili pepper and vanilla.

Always served in liquid form, the drink is consumed by the Native Americans at a high rate. Emperor Montezuma II drinks up to 50 cups a day. The Spaniards hope to take the chocolate, as they call it, back to Europe—although they plan to find some way to help ease the bitter taste.



Region • Cacao seeds grow inside pods like this. ▲

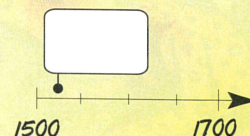
## The Arrival of the Spanish

The leader of the Spanish army that first landed on the shores of Mexico was Hernán Cortés. He hoped to win new lands for Spain, as well as gold and glory for himself.

Cortés reached the east coast of Mexico in 1519 with about 500 soldiers. He claimed the land for the king and queen of Spain. Quickly, however, he learned that the land was ruled by the powerful Aztec emperor Montezuma II.

## TAKING NOTES

Use your time line to take notes about Mexico.





## A Clash of Cultures

Montezuma II ruled an empire of between 5 and 6 million people. However, many of his Native American subjects wanted to be free. They helped the Spanish conquer the Aztec king. They did not expect that the Spanish would become their new rulers.

**The First Encounter** Montezuma II heard about the arrival of the Spanish, and soon he welcomed Cortés with gifts. He even allowed Cortés to stay in a royal palace in the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán. Within a week, Cortés took Montezuma II prisoner—and took control of the Aztec Empire.



### Connections to Science

**Invisible Weapons** Smallpox and other diseases from Europe killed millions of Native Americans between 1500 and 1900. Smallpox (germ cell shown below right) had long been widespread in Europe, and most Europeans were at least partly immune. Native Americans, however, had no immunity to it because it had never before existed in the Americas.

Within months of the Spanish soldiers' arrival in Mexico, many thousands of Native Americans got sick with smallpox (shown below) and died from it—including Montezuma II's successor. Smallpox proved far more deadly to Native Americans than Spanish swords and cannons.



**The Spanish Takeover** Other Aztec leaders drove the Spanish from Tenochtitlán. However, during the fighting that followed, Montezuma II was killed. The Spanish then retook the city, greatly aided by their Native American allies. The Spanish also had an essential advantage over the Aztec: their weapons. The Aztec had only war clubs, spears, and arrows. The Spanish soldiers had steel swords, armor, guns, and cannons, as well as horses. The invading army destroyed Tenochtitlán street by street.

## The Founding of New Spain

The fall of Tenochtitlán in 1521 marked the end of the Aztec Empire and the beginning of Spanish rule in Mexico. The Spanish called their empire “New Spain,” just as the English called their territory in North America “New England.” Where Tenochtitlán had stood, the Spanish established Mexico City as their capital. Spain ruled Mexico for the next 300 years.

**A New Way of Life** The Spanish victory caused more than a change of rulers in Mexico. The Spanish introduced a different way of life to the region. They brought new animals, such as horses, cattle, sheep, and pigs. They also brought new trades, such as ironsmithing and shipbuilding. They brought a new religion as well—Christianity.

**Culture** • Aztec feather shields offered less protection than Spanish metal helmets and armor. ▲

### Reading Social Studies

**A. Analyzing Motives** Why did some Native Americans help the Spanish fight the Aztec?

### Vocabulary

**ironsmithing:** making items out of iron



## The Influence of the Church

Because the Catholic Church was powerful in Spain, it soon became powerful in New Spain. Catholic priests set up churches, schools, and hospitals. Sometimes Native Americans accepted Christianity willingly. Sometimes, though, they were forced to become Christian against their will.

**A Cultural Blend** Even though the Native Americans had to accept many new ways of life, the old ways were not lost entirely. For instance, an essential element of Native American cooking was the tortilla, a flat, round bread made from corn or flour. Tortillas are still made daily all over Mexico. As with food, many other aspects of the two cultures blended in the new Mexican culture.

## Life in New Spain

A new multilayered society developed in Mexico. The ruling class were Spanish officials who were born in Spain. They were called *peninsulares* (peh•neen•soo•LAH•rehhs) because they were from the Iberian Peninsula in Europe.

A second class were *criollos* (kree•AW•yaws), people who were born in Mexico but whose parents were born in Spain. *Criollos* were often wealthy and powerful, but they were not in as high a social class as the *peninsulares*.

A *mestizo* (mehs•TEE•saw) is a person who is of Spanish and Native American ancestry. *Mestizos* formed the third layer of New Spain's society.

### BACKGROUND

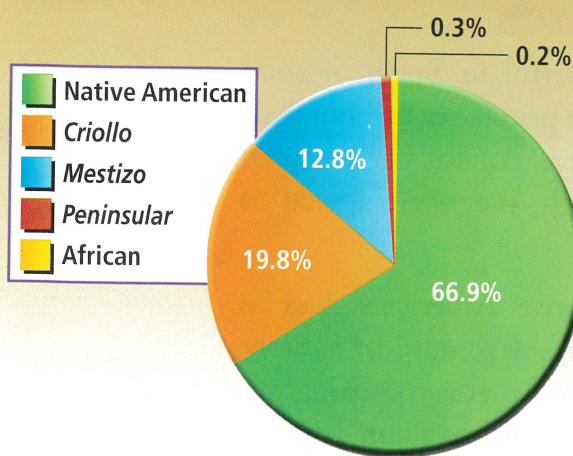
The Iberian Peninsula consists of two countries—Portugal and Spain. (See the map of Europe on page 262.)

**Movement •** Mexicans today celebrate Catholic holy days that the Spanish established. This festival honors Our Lady of Guadalupe. ▼





## Population of Mexico in 1810



### SKILLBUILDER: Reading a Graph

1. What percentage of the Mexican population in 1810 was Native American?
2. Were there more *peninsulares* or *criollos* in Mexico in 1810?

A fourth group of people arrived in Mexico unwillingly—the enslaved Africans brought by European slave ships. African farming techniques, musical traditions, and crafts soon blended into the Mexican culture.

**Encomienda** New Spain's largest group was the Native Americans. They made up the bottom layer of society. The rulers of Spain set up in Mexico a system called *encomienda* (ehn•kaw•MYEHN•dah). Under this system, Spanish men were each given a Native American village to oversee. The villagers had to pay tribute—in goods, money, or labor—to this Spaniard. They were

essentially enslaved. The results of their labor helped to make Spain rich. However, the villagers lived in poverty and hardship.

### Vocabulary

**tribute:**  
a forced payment

## The War of Independence

Based on earlier European and American political writers, many Mexican religious and political leaders in the early 1800s were saying that Mexicans should be free to choose their own government. They argued that Mexico should be independent from Spain. The demand for Mexican independence grew stronger after 1808, when France conquered Spain.

**A Cry for Freedom** Then, before dawn on September 16, 1810, the farmers in the mountain village of Dolores heard their church bells ringing. At the church, their priest, **Father Miguel Hidalgo**, gave a fiery speech urging them to throw off Spanish rule. No one knows the exact text of the speech, but it is known as the *Grito de Dolores* (Cry of Dolores). Urged on by his words, a small army of Native Americans and *mestizos* marched with Father Hidalgo toward Mexico City. Along the way, thousands more joined them.

**A Difficult Challenge** Father Hidalgo's army had few weapons. Mostly, his men carried clubs and farm tools, such as sickles and axes. When they faced the government soldiers, the farmers were soon defeated. Father Hidalgo was captured and executed, but the revolution he had sparked did not die.

### Reading Social Studies

**B. Clarifying**  
What ideas from other parts of the world did Mexicans agree with?

### Vocabulary

**sickle:**  
a blade used for cutting tall grass or grain



## BACKGROUND

Mexico's independence was based on "three guarantees": that it would be independent from Spain, that it would be Catholic, and that *criollos* and *peninsulares* would be equal.

**Independence at Last** New leaders took Father Hidalgo's place. A few wealthy Spanish nobles and many *criollos* joined the fight for independence. The struggle lasted for 11 years. In 1821, the rebels finally overthrew the Spanish government, and Mexico became independent. However, the *peninsulares* and *criollos* still ruled the country. Native Americans and *mestizos* benefited little from independence from Spain.

## War with the United States

In 1821, the new nation of Mexico was far larger than it is today. You can see on the map on page 178 that northern Mexico included much of what is now the Southwestern United States. Spanish explorers claimed this entire region in the 1500s and 1600s. Spanish and Mexican priests built missions there in the 1600s.

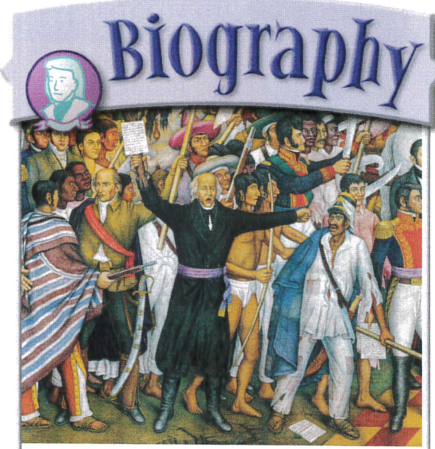
**Desert and Distance** Much of this land was desert. Travel was slow and communication difficult. Mexico was at war with Native Americans in this region, such as the Apache and the Comanche tribes. For all these reasons, few Mexicans settled there.

To encourage settlement, the Mexican government invited foreigners to move into these northern lands. Most of the newcomers were from the United States and still felt some loyalty to that country. By the 1830s, settlers in Texas from the United States greatly outnumbered those from Mexico.

**Texas Independence** In 1835, many settlers in Texas decided to break away from Mexico and rose in revolt. After several fierce battles, the Texans won their independence. They set up the Republic of Texas in 1836.

Most Texans wanted to become part of the United States. In 1845, the United States agreed, but Mexico and the United States could not agree where the boundary between Texas and Mexico should be. Each side claimed land that the other wanted.

**The Mexican War** In 1846, the dispute grew into a war. During the next two years, U.S. forces won control of northern Mexico; it was made official when Mexico was forced to sign the **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**.



**Father Hidalgo** Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, shown in the center of the illustration above, was born in 1753. He was a *criollo* who felt great sympathy for the Native Americans and *mestizos*. As a priest in the small village of Dolores, Father Hidalgo joined a secret group that fought for Mexico's independence.

Father Hidalgo is known as the Father of Mexican Independence. Every September 16, Mexicans shout slogans from the *Grito de Dolores* in celebration of their independence and Father Hidalgo.

**Place •** You can still see this mission, built in 1700, in Arizona today. ▼





## Mexican Territory Lost to the United States as of 1853



### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting a Map

- Location** • What river formed the new border between Mexico and the Texas territory?
- Region** • About how many U.S. states were eventually formed from what had been Mexican territory?

A few years later, in 1853, the **Gadsden Purchase** gave the United States more of Mexico's northern land. The two countries have since made slight adjustments to the border, but they have not fought a war again.

## SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

### Terms & Names

- Explain the significance of:
  - peninsular
  - criollo
  - mestizo
  - encomienda
  - Father Miguel Hidalgo
  - Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
  - Gadsden Purchase

### Using Graphics

- Use a chart like this one to list the five social groups that made up New Spain and their characteristics.

Social Group	Characteristics

### Main Ideas

- What advantages allowed Cortés's small army to conquer Mexico?
  - In what ways did Spanish rule change life in Mexico?
  - What were the results of the war between Mexico and the United States?

### Critical Thinking

#### 4. Analyzing Causes

Why did Mexicans decide to fight for independence from Spain?

#### Think About

- influential events around the world
- reasons for discontent among the *criollos*, *mestizos*, and Native Americans

### ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Reread the information about the first meeting of the Spanish and the Aztec. Write a **short story** describing the event from either the Spanish or Aztec viewpoint.