

NKU Alternative Spring Break 2003: Mexican History – *Some Fragments*

About 1000 BCE the **Olmec** culture flourished in Mexico. The monumental city of **Teotihuacán** was constructed about 100 BCE – 200 CE (by a different culture).

In Southern Mexico, the predominant indigenous culture was **Mayan**, which flourished about 300 – 800 CE. Many indigenous people in the south still speak Mayan languages.

The **Aztec Empire** emerged in the 1300s. Many indigenous people in Central Mexico still speak Aztec languages, such as Nahuatl/Mexicano.¹

Aztec Mexico City was known as **Tenochtitlán**, which probably had a population around 200,000 by 1500, making it one of the largest cities in the world at the time. It was surrounded by lakes, including **Lake Xochimilco** to the south.

The Aztec Empire reached its height under **Montezuma II** just at the time of the Spanish Conquest. The Aztecs were overthrown by Hernan Cortes in 1521. A heroic defense was put up by Aztec leader **Cuauhtemoc**.

Mexico became **New Spain**, 1535.

Rebellion led by Fr. Miguel **Hidalgo** (1810) eventually led to independence from Spain (1821).

U.S. War with Mexico (1846-48), over Texas, led to loss of Mexican territory to US.

Benito **Juarez** overthrew Mexican dictatorship and established a liberal constitution (1855).

France ruled Mexico 1864-1867 after intervening in a civil war.

Dictator Porfirio **Diaz** controlled Mexico 1876-1911, modernizing the economy and encouraging foreign investment, but causing severe inequalities that eventually led to internal revolts.

Important “revolutionary figures” now revered in Mexico:

Emiliano **Zapata**– indigenous farmer, fought government for control of the south

Pancho **Villa**– a northern Mexico rebel, fought and eluded the US army

U.S. invaded Mexico in 1916 and helped to overthrow the government of President Victoriano Huerta, leading to much anti-U.S. sentiment.

The *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (**PRI**) was *the* political party in Mexico, from 1929 until losing the presidential elections in 2000 (but it is still a powerful force).

In the 1980s, *maquiladoras* – factories located along the US-Mexico border owned by foreign companies making finished goods for the US market – became a significant force in the Mexican economy.

An **earthquake** hit Mexico City in 1985, killing over 8,000 and causing \$4 billion in damage.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (**NAFTA**) took effect in 1994. It removed most barriers to trade between the US and Mexico. It is having a profound effect on the Mexican economy.

In 1994, Mayan peoples led by a “Subcommandante Marcos” formed the EZLN (the “**Zapatistas**”) and attacked towns in Chiapas. The army moved in, an unstable peace was restored, but issues of land reform and indigenous rights remain unresolved.

Current President: **Vicente Fox**, of the conservative PAN party, a former Coca-Cola executive.

¹ “Axan tla nechhualnotzih mexicano, entonces nicnanquilia ica mexicano, huan tla nechhualnotzih castellano, tambien nicnanquilia”. “Now if someone comes along addressing me in Mexicano, then I reply to him in Mexicano, and if someone comes along speaking to me in Spanish, also I reply to him.” Quoted in J. Hill and K. Hill, *Speaking Mexicano: Dynamics of Syncretic Language in Central Mexico* (U Arizona Press, 1986).