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 Aztecan languages, such as Nahuatl/Mexicano.

Aztec Mexico City was known as Tenochtitlan, 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 lead 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).