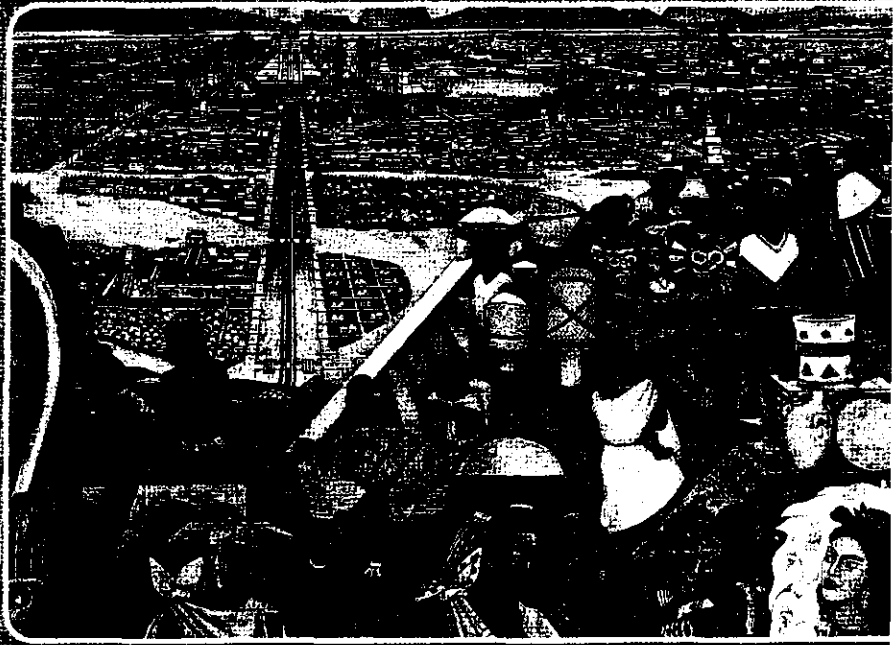


Struggle for POWER



convert, v., to cause someone to adopt a different religion



myWorld Activity
To Dig or Not to Dig

Spanish Rule to Independence

In the late 1400s, explorers from Spain sailed to the Americas and began building colonies. The Spanish heard stories of a people—the Aztecs—who had large cities and vast amounts of silver and gold. The Spanish set out to find these people, leading to an encounter that changed the history of Mexico.

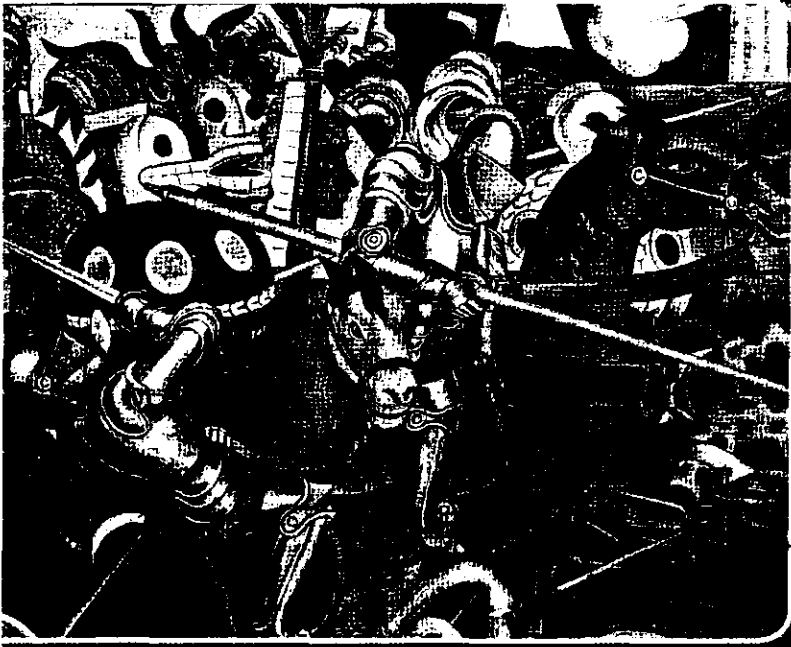
Arrival of Cortés In 1519, Spanish conquistador **Hernan Cortés** landed in Mexico. A **conquistador** is a soldier-explorer. The Aztecs greatly outnumbered Cortés and his 500 soldiers. Yet in just two years, Cortés defeated the Aztec Empire. Tens of thousands of Aztecs and their subjects died in the fighting.

Cortés destroyed Tenochtitlán and built Mexico City in its place.

Culture Change Under the Spanish, the lives of native peoples changed. Settlers from Spain and their descendants held the highest place in society. Native peoples had few rights. Priests came to Mexico to convert Native Americans to the Roman Catholic religion. The church became an important part of life in the new colony. Churches were built in the centers of towns and cities, and church officials became leaders in the colony.

Spain Struggles By the **1700s**, Spain's empire had weakened. Spain's rulers decided to change the political and economic system to improve conditions in Mexico. They made new laws that led to increased trade. As Mexico's economy revived, Spain raised taxes and sent new officials to rule Mexico.

While Spain tried to improve Mexico,



new ideas swept across Europe and the Americas. A movement called the Enlightenment questioned the rule of kings, and proposed that people had basic rights—rights that many in Mexico did not enjoy. People in North America acted on these ideas and declared independence from Great Britain. Their founding of the United States stood as an example to Spain's colonies.

Separating from Spain Early in the 1800s, the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Spain. He named his brother Spain's new king. The French put a new person in control, who briefly ruled Mexico. In 1810, Mexicans launched a revolt that ended in 1821 with Mexico winning independence from Spain.

Reading Check How long did it take for Mexico to win independence?

Challenges for the Republic

While Mexicans had won independence, they faced new challenges. For many decades, their leaders struggled to solve the nation's problems.

Troubled Beginnings After the United States won independence, its new government struggled. In a few years, though, Americans wrote a new constitution that brought stability. The same did not happen in Mexico. The Mexican people did write a constitution, but different leaders competed for power. For the first few decades of Mexico's existence as a nation, they could not create a stable government.

In the middle 1800s, Benito Juárez became the leader of Mexico. He promised to make many changes that would help the nation's poor. Juárez

Struggle for **POWER** continued



THINK CRITICALLY

estate, *n.*, a large piece of land or property

promised to break up the large estates that the wealthy held and give some of this land to poor farmers.

Some Mexicans resented the changes Juárez made because they would lose wealth and power. They sought help from France. The French government sent an army that defeated Juárez. Then, France put an Austrian noble named Maximilian in control of Mexico. He tried to bring peace to the nation, but Juárez's supporters fought on. After several more years of fighting, Maximilian was overthrown. Back in power, Juárez was unable to make all the reforms he wanted.

Mexico under Díaz From the 1870s to 1911, Mexico's leader was Porfirio Díaz. At first, he tried to put in place many of the reforms of Juárez. He also tried to build Mexico's economy by inviting

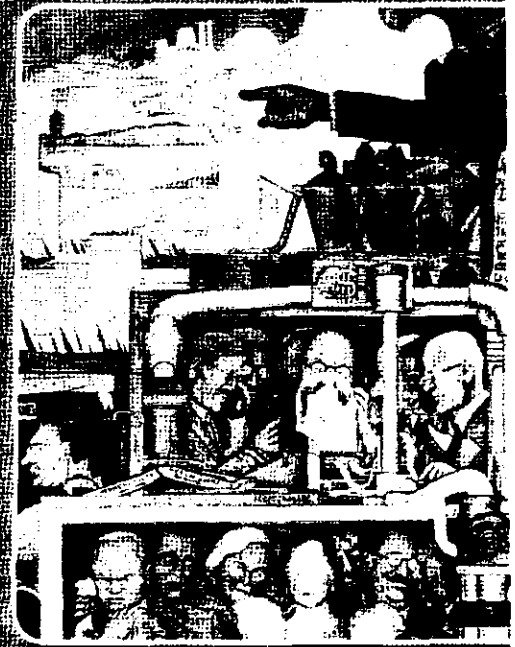
foreign companies to build railroads and do other projects. Only a small number of Mexicans benefited, though. The great majority of people still lived in poverty. They worked long hours and had few rights and little food.

Mexican Revolution Unrest spread. Finally, in 1910, a candidate for president that Díaz supported lost the election to an opponent. Díaz had the opponent arrested and declared his man the winner. This action, along with Mexico's history of widespread poverty, sparked the Mexican Revolution, a period of armed rebellion in which Mexican people fought for political and social reform.

Constitution of 1917 The fighting eased in 1917, when a new constitution was declared. The new constitution made the government responsible for improving



▲ *Tierra y libertad* means "land and liberty," which referred to the idea that more people should be able to own land.



▲ The final panel shows Venustiano Carranza, the promiser of Mexico's national revolution.

Mexicans' lives. It declared the goal of giving land to poor farmers and more rights to workers.

Venustiano Carranza became president of Mexico but did not make many of the constitutional changes he promised. In

a few years, leaders joined to overthrow him. In the next few decades, Mexico's leaders made some reforms, but the poor continued to suffer.

Reading Check What caused the Mexican Revolution in 1910?

Section 2 Assessment

Essential Question

Key Terms

1. How did the Maya use their knowledge of astronomy?
2. What is a conquistador?

Key Ideas

3. What important role did the Olmecs play among Mexico's native peoples?
4. How did the development of Mexico's government differ from that of the United States?
5. What changes did the Constitution of 1917 promise to Mexico's people?

Think Critically

6. **Synthesize** What role did the Roman Catholic Church play in colonial Mexico?
7. **Draw Inferences** What details support the idea that the Mexican Revolution was not a complete success?

How much does **geography shape a country?**

8. How did Mexico's geography and the struggle for resources affect the history of Mexico? Go to your Student Journal to record your answer.