

CINCO DE MAYO

A celebration of triumph against all odds



WHAT IS CINCO DE MAYO?

Cinco de Mayo, or the fifth of May, is a holiday that celebrates the date of the Mexican army's May 5, 1862 victory over France at the Battle of Puebla during the Franco-Mexican War. The day, which falls on Wednesday, May 5 in 2021, is also known as Battle of Puebla Day. While it is a relatively minor holiday in Mexico, in the United States, Cinco de Mayo has evolved into a commemoration of Mexican culture and heritage, particularly in areas with large Mexican-American populations.

CONFUSION WITH MEXICAN INDEPENDENCE DAY

Many people outside Mexico mistakenly believe that Cinco de Mayo is a celebration of Mexican independence, which was declared more than 50 years before the Battle of Puebla.

Independence Day in Mexico (Día de la Independencia) is commemorated on September 16, the anniversary of the revolutionary priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla's famous "Grito de Dolores" ("Cry of Dolores," referring to the city of Dolores Hidalgo, Mexico), a call to arms that amounted to a declaration of war against the Spanish colonial government in 1810.

FUN FACT:

Within Mexico, Cinco de Mayo is primarily observed in the state of Puebla, where Zaragoza's unlikely victory occurred, although other parts of the country also take part in the celebration.

Traditions include military parades, recreations of the Battle of Puebla and other festive events. For many Mexicans, however, May 5 is a day like any other: It is not a federal holiday, so offices, banks and stores remain open.

THE BATTLE OF PUEBLA

In 1861, Benito Juárez, a lawyer and the first indigenous president, a member of the Zapotec Tribe, was elected president of Mexico.

At the time, the country was in financial ruin after years of internal conflict and the new president was forced to default on debt payments to European governments. In response, France, Britain, and Spain sent naval forces to Veracruz, Mexico, demanding repayment.

Britain and Spain negotiated with Mexico and withdrew their forces. France, however, ruled by Napoleon III, decided to use the opportunity to carve an empire out of Mexican territory.

A well-armed French fleet stormed Veracruz, landing a large force of troops and driving President Juárez and his government into retreat.

6,000 French troops under General Charles Latrille de Lorencez set out to attack Puebla de Los Angeles, a small town in east-central Mexico.

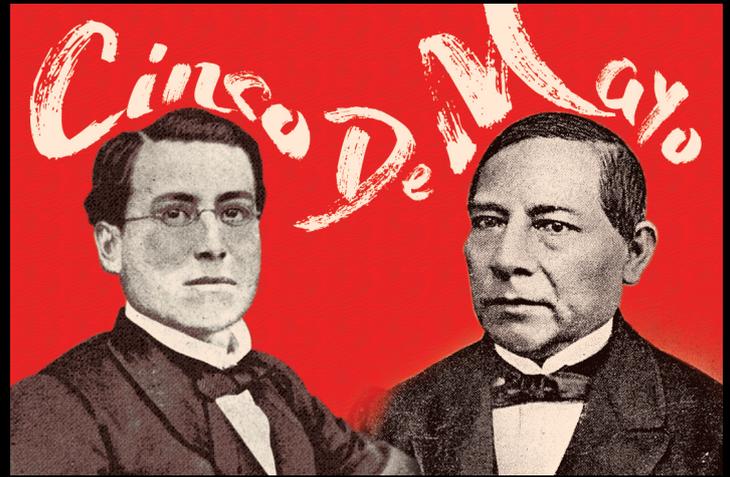
From his new headquarters in the north, Juárez rounded up a force of about 2,000 loyal men—many of them either Indigenous Mexicans or of mixed ancestry—and sent them to Puebla. Most men had no combat experience.

The vastly outnumbered and poorly supplied Mexicans, led by General Ignacio Zaragoza, fortified the town and prepared for the French assault. On May 5, 1862, Lorencez gathered his army—supported by heavy artillery—before the city of Puebla and led an assault.

The battle lasted from daybreak to early evening, and when the French finally retreated they had lost nearly 500 soldiers. Fewer than 100 Mexicans had been killed in the clash.

Although not a major strategic win in the overall war against the French, Zaragoza's success at the Battle of Puebla on May 5 represented a great symbolic victory for the Mexican government and bolstered the resistance movement. In 1867 France finally withdrew.

The same year, Austrian Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian, who had been installed as emperor of Mexico in 1864 by Napoleon, was captured and executed by Juárez's forces. Puebla de Los Angeles was renamed for General Zaragoza, who died of typhoid fever months after his historic triumph there.



General Zaragoza & Benito Juarez

DID YOU KNOW?

Chicano activists raised awareness of the holiday in the 1960s, in part because they identified with the victory of Indigenous Mexicans over European invaders during the Battle of Puebla. A celebration of Mexican pride against all odds.



REASON TO CELEBRATE

Some historians argue that the reason why Cinco de Mayo is so widely celebrated in the U.S. is that the victory at Puebla benefited the U.S. since the French invasion was presumptively to establish a monarchy to rival the growing power of the United States

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