EVERYDAY LIFE, 1821–46: TRADITION AND TURMOIL

After Independence Mexico experienced a half-century of transition. The country was much changed, especially in the realm of politics and government, but the core of everyday life retained its essential characteristics. Neither thousands of years of indigenous tradition and culture, nor 300 years of Spanish colonial heritage disappeared. Most Mexicans ate the same foods, resided in the same kind of dwellings, and wore the same kinds of clothes as had their ancestors for decades if not centuries. The constant tension and frequent conflict between elite visions of a modern nation, the reluctance of common people to accede to them, and the transformations that would result do much to explain the often muddled events of the nineteenth century. The conditions of daily life both influenced and were affected by local, regional, and national politics. The major issues of the era, such as local autonomy, access to land, taxes, the military draft, the role of the Catholic Church, and the fair application of laws were deeply interwoven into the fabric of everyday life and were contested at all levels.

In 1800 there were approximately 6 million residents of New Spain (colonial Mexico). Fifty years later, with the population growing at less than one percent a year, there were 7.6 million inhabitants. Incessant wars, periodic epidemics, including a deadly cholera outbreak in 1850, and the expulsion of Spaniards following Independence accounted for the slow population growth. Most Mexicans were Indians or mestizos. The countryside was more Indian

Thanks to Silvia Arrom, whose investigations provide almost all the material on Mexico City women and Frederick Shaw, whose dissertation furnishes the material on Mexico City's dismal conditions. I also wish to extend my appreciation to Harry Cross, Charles Harris, Friedrich Katz, Florencia Mallon, Simon Miller, and Richard Warren.

than the cities. At the turn of the nineteenth century, for example, the state of Puebla was 75 percent Indian, 10 percent white, and 15 percent castas (mixed bloods, such as mestizos and mulattoes), but the city of Puebla was 25 percent white, 40 percent casta, and 35 percent Indian. In 1814 the Yucatán peninsula was 75 percent Maya (Indian), 14 percent European, and 11 percent mixed blood.

Typically, nineteenth-century Mexicans resided in one of four categories of communities. Most lived in the countryside either on haciendas (large landholdings), where they worked for the hacienda or leased its land as tenants or sharecroppers, or in villages, where they cultivated their own individual or communal small plots. A third much smaller group lived in mining camps. Mexico's urban population was concentrated overwhelmingly in Mexico City, whose population from 1820 to 1900 fluctuated between 150,000 and 200,000. In rural areas much of the land was controlled by owners of haciendas, known as hacendados. The majority of the rural population consisted of Indians, who continued to live as in colonial times in relatively autonomous villages (pueblos). The *milpa*—the small, individual plot of land used for family subsistence farming—was the basis of rural life. There were also small properties called *ranchos.* (The term "rancho" had different meanings according to region.) Communally held landholding predominated in many regions, particularly in the Valley of Mexico and its environs.

The Haciendas

Conditions on Mexican haciendas in the nineteenth century are much debated by scholars. Because their operations varied widely according to era, region, size, and crops, it is almost impossible to describe a typical hacienda. Fortunately, records from a number of haciendas survive for the period. It is from these illuminating documents that we can piece together the following descriptions.

Haciendas had a unique hierarchical structure. At the top of hacienda society was the owner, the hacendado, and his family. Beneath the hacendado were the supervisors and administrators, headed by the chief administrator or *mayordomo.* Males typically headed haciendas, but occasionally a widow operated a large property. Hacendados, at least in the early decades of the nineteenth century, hardly lived in opulence on their estates. Fanny Calderón de la Barca, the wife of the minister (now called ambassador) of Spain to Mex-

ico, visited the sugar estate of Anselmo Zurutuza near Cuernavaca in the 1840s and wrote the following:

> As for the interior of these haciendas, they are all pretty much alike . . . a great stone building, which is neither farm nor country-house . . . , but has a character peculiar to itself—solid enough to stand a siege, with floors of painted brick, large deal tables, wooden benches, painted chairs, and white-washed walls; one or two painted or iron bedsteads, only put up when wanted; numberless empty rooms; kitchen and outhouses; the courtyard a great square round which stand the house for boiling the sugar, whose furnaces burn day and night; the house with machinery for extracting the juice from the cane. . . .

Although many hacendados lived modestly without opulence, the economic boom that came later in the century would change all this. Large landowners who lived near towns and cities often chose to reside away from their estates to enjoy the greater comforts of urban life.

In general there were two broad groups of people employed on the large estate: those who worked permanently on the hacienda and those who were temporary laborers. Permanent inhabitants included resident peons, tenants, and sharecroppers, though the latter two types of workers did not necessarily have to reside on the property. Temporary labor on the haciendas came from neighboring villages. Villagers supplemented their incomes from communally held land or family plots by working seasonally at planting and harvest on the hacienda.

Some hacendados farmed their own land with their own employees. Others rented or sharecropped the land to locals. Depending on the time, place, and crops, tenants paid their rent to the hacendado in the form of cash or a portion of the harvest. Though most tenants leased small plots, there were a few who leased entire haciendas. Sharecroppers paid the landowners a predetermined percentage of the harvest, usually half. Although the hacendado's profit potential was higher when he farmed his own land, the risk was greater. Tenants and sharecroppers assumed the risks of drought and failed harvests. Probably the most common arrangement in this era was a mixture of owner- and renter-cultivated lands. The hacienda's directly farmed land employed permanent and temporary labor, who may or may not have lived on the estate. What is considered to have been a typical arrangement in the central region of Mexico between the hacendado and his employees and tenants is described below.

Resident peons earned wages and a good ration of corn to feed their families and received the use of small plots of land for cultivation. Tenants received a hut, firewood, seeds, and some pasturage, along with their plots, in return for half their crop. Occasionally tenants worked for the hacendado and earned cash. It appears that for peons the crucial part of the arrangement was the corn ration. Hacendados were obligated by custom in some areas to provide peons with the ration regardless of the market price of corn. Because corn comprised an average seventy-five percent of a peon family's diet, this ensured the peon's basic staple even in periods of drought and crop failure and partially insulated him and his family from the effects of inflation. Tenants and sharecroppers had no such security. Their well-being depended on the vagaries of the weather. A good-sized plot with oxen and good rain might turn a profit, but there were no guarantees. We do not know very much about the situations of day laborers other than the fact that agricultural wages remained nominally the same in the central area of Mexico throughout the nineteenth century.

Debt peonage is the most notorious and controversial aspect of hacienda labor. In this system peons would go into debt to the hacienda in order to pay church taxes and fees; expenses for rites of passage, such as marriage and baptism; or ordinary purchases at the hacienda store. Peons would then be obligated to work until they repaid the debt. But the peon, of course, often could not repay it. In some regions multiple generations were tied to the hacienda, since children were expected to repay their parents' debts. Debt peonage in a few areas was nearly indistinguishable from slavery. For example, on the haciendas of the Sánchez Navarro family, whose properties extended through Coahuila and Durango, armed retainers hunted peons who tried to escape their obligations. In other areas, however, debt served as a kind of cash advance or bonus, attracting peons to work on a particular hacienda. In some regions where labor was scarce, the hacienda store, which scholars have long considered to be a villainous institution that overcharged and cheated workers to keep them in insurmountable debt, may have actually subsidized peons. The hacienda store certainly was not always a profit center for the hacienda, nor necessarily an instrument of repression.

Conditions on the haciendas varied according to region, depending on the availability of labor. A relatively dense population concentrated in mestizo or Indian villages, as in the central area of the nation, meant a large pool of potential workers and, therefore, low wages and less favorable terms for ten-

ants and sharecroppers. Labor shortages, as in the far north and the far sou produced one of two outcomes: heavy competition for workers, which raise wages and added benefits, such as advances on wages; or intensification of co ercion to retain employees.

The Hacienda del Maguey, a grain and livestock estate in Zacatecas, pro vides us with an example of a mix of certain elements of both central and northern estates, although its living conditions were a bit more benign than most. The normal workday on this hacienda lasted from 6 A.M. to 6 P.M. There were breaks for breakfast and a traditional midday dinner followed by a rest ing period (siesta), which lasted for two to three hours. The complete work day was therefore eight to nine hours long. Given the standards experienced by the nineteenth-century industrial workforce in the United States or West ern Europe, this was not an arduous day in terms of hours. The work load was fairly light for much of the year, although the few weeks devoted to harvest, sowing, and weeding were certainly more strenuous. Work on livestock ha ciendas was less demanding. Shepherds, for example, merely followed their flocks of sheep. Their actual hours may have been long, but much of their time was spent sitting and sleeping. Labor was intense only during roundups for slaughter once a week or for shearing in March and August.

A peon on the Hacienda del Maguey, by the calculations of historian Harry Cross, was quite well nourished, more than meeting his daily caloric require- ments. The average peon laboring in the fields probably needed 2,150 calo- ries a day. His family, approximately two adults and two children, by extension would require 9,000 calories. The ration of maize provided by his employer contained seventy-five percent of this caloric requirement. The rest of the diet consisted of frijoles (beans), chile peppers, lard, salt, and meat. Meat (pork or beef) was inexpensively purchased by residents of this hacienda. The peon added wheat flour, rice, and sugar purchased at the hacienda store. The typi- cal family would also gather herbs, spices, and cacti from the countryside at no cost. Alcoholic beverages, particularly *pulque*—the fermented juice of the maguey plant—were consumed in large quantities, providing vitamins (in addition to intoxication if taken in excess). The combination of beans and corn provided most of the diet's protein. Cross argues that the combination of the hacienda's rations, their own subsistence plots, and harvesting natural resources furnished country people of the near north with a "remarkably nutritious and diverse diet." By this estimate, families living on the Hacienda

del Maguey were able with little financial strain to eat a nutritionally ade- quate diet.

The Hacienda del Maguey did more than just feed its employees well and treat them fairly. For decades it employed a schoolteacher to educate its chil- dren. Moreover, its peons were free to leave at any time. Cross calculates that 9.78 percent of the hacienda population was over 50. In the same era, the pro- portion of whites over 50 in the United States was slightly higher, which in- dicates that conditions on the hacienda could not have been too bad.

In Yucatán, located in the far south, the main supply of hacienda labor came from temporary workers called *luneros*. Instead of wages, luneros were granted access to hacienda land and water in return for one day's labor each week on Monday—hence the name lunero from the Spanish word for Mon- day (*lunes*). This arrangement benefited both parties, for the worker received land for subsistence, while the landowner obtained workers without having to pay high wages, despite relative labor scarcity. During the economic growth that occurred in the nineteenth century, Yucatecan haciendas doubled their labor needs. The lunero system proved insufficient in these new conditions. As a result, a new form of debt peonage evolved in which the hacendado as- sumed responsibility for paying the peon's church taxes, and, in exchange, the peon was bound to labor on the hacienda until he repaid his debt.

The estate for which we have the most information in this era was that of the Sánchez Navarro family. At its largest, this hacienda's vast holdings en- compassed in excess of 15 million acres spread over the states of Coahuila and Durango. Situated in the middle of the war zone with the Comanches and Apaches, working conditions were quite dangerous. The Sánchez Navarros maintained both a resident and temporary labor force by means of indebt- edness. They first acquired a substantial number of peons with the purchase of the enormous Marquisate of Aguayo in 1840; the transaction transferred the peons' debts to the new owner. Because of the constant state of war with Comanches and the geographic isolation of the entire Sánchez Navarro estate, there was an ongoing, acute shortage of labor. To complicate matters, the es- tate's need for workers was highly seasonal, with the most intense demands for planting, harvest, and sheep shearing. Temporary agricultural labor was paid in cash and sometimes a ration in addition. A passer-by noted the con- ditions for resident peons in 1846:

> The poor peon lives in a miserable mud hovel or reed hut (sometimes built of cornstalks, thatched with grass). He is allowed a peck of corn a week for his subsistence, and a small monthly pay for his clothes. . . .

Shepherds and cowboys (*vaqueros*) earned more than common laborers: five pesos a month and two pecks of corn (a peck equals a quarter bushel or eight quarts) a week. Peons generally earned two or three pesos a month and one or two pecks of corn a week. These modest wages hardly covered an average family's necessities. However, peons incurred much of their debt because of religious fees for baptisms, marriages, and burials rather than through the purchase of necessities. As a general practice, the local cleric billed the estate for these services and the hacendado then added this sum to a peon's account. Employees lost part of their pay when they missed a day's work and when they lost or broke a tool. As a result of these cumulative charges, many peons fell hopelessly in debt. The hacienda, for the most part, limited individual indebtedness to no more than fifty pesos or ten months' wages. The highest amount owed by a peon on the books was 137 pesos (more than two years' salary).

Corporal punishment was an ongoing part of hacienda culture (though obviously not accepted by the victims) and abuses were not uncommon. One of the Sánchez Navarros' mayordomos, Atanacio Muñoz, was particularly brutal, employing a club (whipping was illegal) to discipline miscreants. Peons who fled the hacienda for whatever reason were hunted down. The pursuit was sometimes relentless. One hapless peon avoided capture for seven years until he foolishly returned to the hacienda to visit his wife one night and was captured. Another unfortunate, Dionisio Beltrán, evaded his creditors for more than six years, only to be apprehended in Zacatecas, more than 200 miles away.

It seems that no one on the Sánchez Navarro estates starved and examples of mistreatment of peons were probably limited, but conditions were nonetheless harsh. The climate was inhospitable—temperatures often went to extremes of hot and cold and sometimes years went by without rain. The danger from raids by Apaches and Comanches was considerable; a number of residents lost their lives every year.

Although we know little about the lives of most country women, we do have some pictures of women's lives among the middle-class. In the big house (*casco*) women dressed in linen or silk. They spent much of the morning, beginning around nine, doing needlework together in the drawing room and working in what was called "virtuous silence." After the midday meal every female family member carried out routine chores before retiring for a siesta (nap). During the mid-afternoon the women gathered again to continue their needlework. Males and females gathered at eight in the evening to say prayers and eat the evening meal. Another hour of needlework followed while one of the men read aloud to the family. Daily life for both men and women therefore focused on work and meals.

Women administered the domestic sphere and, at times, may have taken over as family heads when husbands were away. Girls stayed at home while the boys went (sometimes far away) to school. The young women learned needlework and enough reading competency to carry out religious observances. One of the more curious relationships was that between wealthy families and their household servants, who were at once part of and separate from the family. A hacienda's rich and poor children grew up together, even shared confidences, but friendship was never a possibility, because the social barriers between classes were too great.

The Villages

We know substantially less about daily life in the pueblos than on the haciendas, for the villages did not leave the kinds of documentation generated by the estates. Villages certainly existed in both symbiotic and conflictual relationship with haciendas. Villagers relied on the estates for work to supplement their earnings from working their own lands. Haciendas, in turn, depended on village residents for temporary labor and tenants. Not infrequently, however, haciendas and pueblos clashed over land and water rights. Because the hacienda owners were the political elite, they of course dominated the countryside for most of the era. But the relationship between villages and haciendas was, perhaps, most equal in the 1821–85 period, when haciendas were severely weakened by shrinking markets for their products and uncertain political conditions.

The villages had their own forms of social stratification with *caciques* (local bosses), municipal officeholders, and lay leaders of religious organizations comprising the upper level. At times, small traders, muleteers, and some of the larger tenants (in terms of quantity of rented land) joined the top group. At

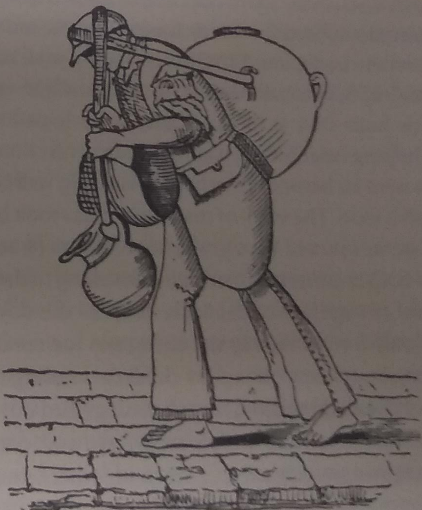
the bottom were poorer residents who worked permanently or temporarily o hacienda peons and tenants with small holdings. Those who left the pueblos to work on the haciendas were called variously *naborios, laborios,* or *gañanes.*

There is probably no model that would adequately describe village poli tics throughout nineteenth-century Mexico. In the highlands of Puebla, his torian Florencia Mallon found villages in "a constant process of change negotiation, and adaptation. . . ." Ethnic and class conflicts abounded. "A civil religious hierarchy" emerged, which combined municipal and *cofradia* (an or ganization set up to support the local church and prepare for local saints days) office holding. Generally, pueblo leadership came from older men, known in Puebla as *pasados.* The pasados nominated people for local offices, made de cisions in times of crisis, and oversaw all dealings by local officeholders with the wider society. Elders attained their elevated status, according to Mallon, not necessarily because of "economic or ethnic prestige," but rather through "service and sacrifice." Those who worked hard for their community became elders. In times of potential conflict communal assemblies were called to re solve them. The good leader was bound to "guard the peace by acting justly." As the century wore on, the ability of the pasados to act fairly and to reach community consensus declined, because of the intrusions of state and na tional governments on their autonomy.

During the colonial era, Indian villages, which fell under jurisdictions known as *repúblicas de indios,* operated with considerable autonomy. As long as their leadership supplied local Spanish authorities with prescribed tax rev enues and neighboring haciendas with requisite labor, the pueblos remained as separate, virtually self-governing, entities. Village leaders often acted as in termediaries between Europeans and Indians. Village autonomy, as discussed in greater detail in chapters 2, 5, and 10, was at the heart of political discourse throughout the nineteenth century.

Politically, all village residents concerned themselves primarily with the protection of individual and collective landholding and with minimizing taxes, both of which required local autonomy, the right to govern their every day affairs without interference from state or national governments. Taxes op pressed country people and throughout the nineteenth century were a never-ending source of friction between indigenous people and the various levels of government. The Maya, for example, deeply resented having to pay annual taxes and fill labor rosters for state projects. Country people were also subject to military conscription.

For most rural dwellers like the Maya life revolved around their individual plots of land (milpas) and their families. Country people lived in two worlds: the first was the subsistence economy wherein ancient practices were retained, and the second was the money and wage economy, the boundaries of which country people carefully limited. The Maya participated in the money economy by working for others at various trades, including carrying the mail for the government. By no means, however, did they adopt the discipline and values of the industrial workplace (to the unending disappointment and irritation of Mexican elites and foreigners). North American John Lloyd Stephens, who traveled extensively in the peninsula in the 1840s, reported that "The Indians worked . . . , as if they had a lifetime for the job." Working slowly, moreover, was only one strategy for resisting the demands of overbearing hacendados. The Maya had longstanding expectations about what they were to be paid. Any attempt to alter existing custom or wages was met with resistance in the form of strikes or mass migrations. The Maya and other rural dwellers expected a wide variety of privileges and protested coercive measures like beatings. For example, protest sometimes took the form of demanding to return home to their own plots at crucial times during plant-



The Aguador

ing and harvest seasons. The Maya might also protest and avert any and all obligations through flight to the forests of neighboring (what was later called) Quintana Roo or Campeche, where they were out of the hacendados' and government authorities' reach.

Despite Maya recalcitrance, Yucatecan landowners and clergy conspired to inculcate labor discipline among them. The Maya owed church taxes, fees for incidental church services, taxes to subsidize periodic church inspections, and taxes to subsidize mandatory catechism for their children, which they could not or would not pay. A landowner had only to pay these delinquent taxes (debts) to the priest, whereupon a local judge would assign the unlucky Maya to the landowner to work off the debt in tasks such as weeding or cane cutting. In effect, the priests in Yucatán, as was also the case in Coahuila, allowed hacendados to use uncollected debts to compel Maya people to work. The priest received cash, while the landowner got labor below market cost. Most of the Maya, tied to their homes by family and tradition, were unwilling to flee and thus suffered. Local and state governments also oppressed the Maya by arbitrarily pressing them into military service.

The Maya considered family life and milpa to be intertwined. For the Maya marriage was a necessary condition of adulthood and they looked for a spouse as soon as they reached the age of responsible labor, usually in their mid-teens. All rural Mexicans utilized the family as an economic unit, both on their own milpas and on the haciendas. Families, including men and women, worked together in the fields, especially during planting and harvest. The men worked eight- to nine-hour days at the hacienda, or perhaps longer on their own milpa, or in helping neighbors at planting and harvest times. But women's responsibilities went far beyond. They had to rise early, well before dawn, to prepare the family's food. The work of making tortillas took hours: the corn had to be soaked for hours, and then ground in a *metate* (stone bowl). Since the men required both breakfast and lunch to take along to the fields, the women had to prepare enough for both meals early in the day. Long, luxurious lunches were only for the rich in the cities, not for rural dwellers. Chores around their modest home, caring for children, tending to the garden and, perhaps, fowl or livestock, and weaving or sewing filled out an active day. Opportunities for women in rural areas were limited and, consequently, a large number of young women migrated to the cities, where most entered domestic service.

Families planted land watered only by erratic rainfall. Often the plots were cultivated by slash and burn, whereby a field was cleared from forest or scrub,

the debris burned for ash fertilizer, and the land tilled with a wooden digging stick. Crops quickly exhausted the land after only two or three years, whereupon the farmer abandoned it. Seven years were typically necessary for the land to restore itself for cultivation. This process, therefore, required enormous amounts of land. The Spaniards had introduced the steel plow, commonly drawn by oxen or horses, but generally Indians could afford neither the equipment nor the livestock.

Though the rural routine was humdrum, it was not without camaraderie and fun. G. F. Lyon, an Englishman on tour in the 1820s, described a scene of two young Indian women grinding maize and slapping tortillas, all the time singing, gossiping, and laughing. The work may have been hard, but it did not preclude a good time.

Religion occupied a central place in rural life as it permeated popular culture. Literate people read devotional pamphlets or books. Devotional artwork decorated the houses of the rich, while altars with candles, flowers, and a likeness of a saint, often occupied a corner of a poor family's hut. Local priests, called *curas*, lived only in the larger villages or towns, but periodically traveled through the villages in their districts to perform masses (Catholic religious services) and sacraments (baptism, marriage, burial). Most country people, however, rarely encountered a priest. As a result, the folk Catholicism practiced in the countryside retained many indigenous customs from pre-Christian times. Perhaps the most important religious institution was the cofradía, the village organization that maintained the church and financed religious celebrations.

The Mining Camps

Mining camps were in constant flux, due to the continuous movement back and forth between the large number of small mining settlements and agricultural villages. Mine owners had great difficulty attracting labor, because of the geographic isolation of most mining regions and the difficulty of the work. Labor scarcity kept wages relatively high and working conditions relatively favorable. Competition for labor forced employers to offer workers better conditions than existed in the countryside.

The economic and social hierarchy in the mining camps shifted according to good and bad times. Big operators, who might have employed hundreds of men and dug out millions of pesos worth of silver and gold, occupied precarious positions, for theirs was a boom and bust business. One never knew

how long a bonanza (rich ore strike) would last. Small operators were nu-
merous, since it was not hard to make a claim for a mine and only a mini-
level of activity legally maintained it. Scavengers worked some older flood-
mines that guerrilla bands had ruined and looted.

There were two categories of workers: skilled and unskilled. Skilled miner
such as *barreteros* or drillers, who often headed their own work gangs in the
mine shafts, earned significantly higher pay. Workers who dug in the dee
shafts earned more than those who worked aboveground, for their jobs re-
quired more skill and were more dangerous. Sometimes miners could smug-
gle ore from the shafts and sell it. Regardless of the skills they possessed or
where they worked, all miners functioned in a high risk occupation. Accidents
were frequent and there were occasional catastrophic cave-ins. The injured
could not work and employers left them to their own devices. Overseers stood
between the mine owners and miners. Rounding out the transient population
of the camps were traders, moneylenders, and ore buyers.

Mexico City

The city was laid out in a grid with an enormous central plaza, called the Zocalo, which still exists today. The great cathedral stood at the north end, with the palace of government on the east, and the municipality offices on the south. Ninety-seven smaller plazas dotted the rest of the city. Five causeways furnished access to the city over the lake beds. As a legacy from Aztec times, the city was divided into distinct sections, known as barrios. One barrio housed predominantly women cigar makers, another muleteers and high-waymen. A third held the *populacho* or *léperos*, as the city's poor were known. Although rich and poor lived near one another, the outer margins of the city were left to the poor while the affluent lived in the central area.

Most residents lived in apartments or modest houses. A small minority, perhaps fifteen percent, resided in the *casas grandes*, the palatial homes of the rich. In the poor-dominated periphery, people lived in rooms rented in crowded tenements known as *vecindades*. According to Frederick Shaw, the interiors of the houses were generally filthy, with trash scattered everywhere. Because the city endured periodic flooding, ground floor rooms were constantly damp. During the rainy season the floods dumped a "foul concoction of mud, garbage, and human feces" in the houses. Badly ventilated, filthy, and crowded, the vecindades were breeding grounds for disease. Apartments lacked cooking facilities, which meant most of the poor took all their meals

from street vendors. Lacking garden plots, people who prepared their own meals bought food from farms on the city's outskirts in local markets. Bread and tortillas were purchased from street vendors or neighborhood stores. Not everyone was fortunate enough to have a roof over their heads. In 1824 Joel Poinsett, the U.S. Minister, estimated that 20,000 people slept in the streets.

The Spaniards built the city on the ruins of the great Aztec capital Tenochtitlán and surrounding dry lake beds, which flooded during the rainy season. As a result, flooding was a serious problem. It was not uncommon in the rainy season for the Zocalo to be knee deep in water and for outlying districts to be transformed into lakes. At times canoes were needed for urban transport. When the floods came, raw sewage floated everywhere.

Mexico City never had enough potable water or sufficient waste disposal (nor does it today). The air smelled horribly from the sewage flowing alongside the roads and the garbage littering the streets. Piles of trash were everywhere, sometimes large enough to block street traffic. Walking the thoroughfares of the city was dangerous to one's health. The city council eventually decided to dump the trash into Lake Texcoco, which was unfortunately one of the most important sources of municipal drinking water. Unsanitary conditions had an enormous cost. Infant mortality rates were very high: more than one-third of all deaths in the city were children under three years of age. Diseases like smallpox, scarlet fever, measles, typhoid, and cholera were endemic. Periodically epidemics erupted: smallpox killed more than 2,000 children in 1840; and cholera killed almost 6,000 in 1833, and 9,000 in 1850. These diseases and others, such as diarrhea and dysentery, undoubtedly were closely associated with the wretched living conditions. The poor, suffering from malnutrition and living in filth, were particularly susceptible. Street noise was appalling. Above all was the din of the church bells, which rang on the hour to call good Catholics to mass.

If the periodic floods, bad smells, unsanitary conditions, and unending noise were not sufficient misery for city residents, earthquakes struck with unsettling frequency. Fanny Calderón de la Barca experienced at least one earthquake:

> Suddenly, the room, the walls, all began to move, and the floor to heave like waves of the sea! At first, I imagined that I was giddy, but almost immediately saw that it was an earthquake. We all ran, or rather staggered as well as we could, into the gallery, where the servants were already arranged on their knees, praying, and crossing themselves with all their might. The shock lasted above a minute and a half, and I believe has done no injury, except

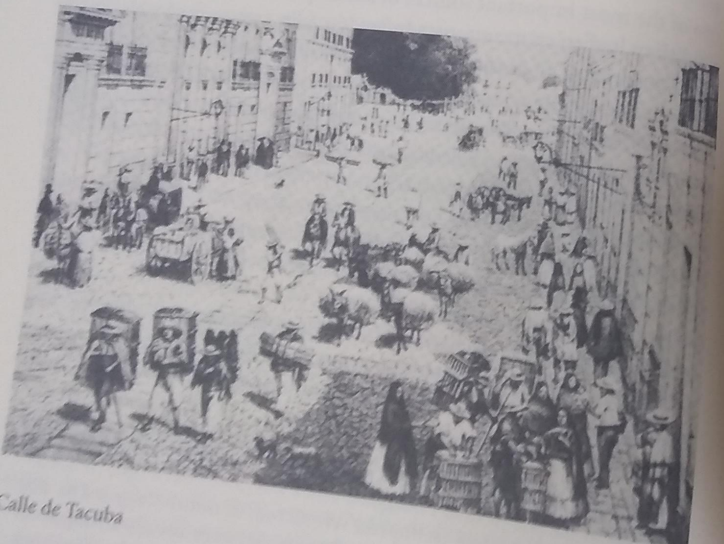
frightening the whole population, and cracking a few old walls. All Mexico was on its knees while it lasted.

The city was not only difficult to inhabit, but enormously busy as well. Fanny Calderón de la Barca described the hustle and bustle of urban life in the 1840s.

> The number of carts, the innumerable Indians loaded like beasts of burden, their women with baskets of vegetables in their hands and children on their backs, the long strings of *arrieros* and their loaded mules, the droves of cattle, the flocks of sheep, the herds of pigs, render it a work of some difficulty to make one's way on horseback out of the gates of Mexico. . . .

Curiously, she noted that "the whole scene is lively and cheerful enough to make one forget that there is such thing as a care in the world."

If all this was not enough, political turmoil at times disrupted the daily routine and presented no little danger as well. Calderón de la Barca was jolted by a rebellion in mid-summer 1840:



Calle de Tacuba

> The state of things is very bad. Cannon planted all along the streets, and soldiers firing indiscriminately on all who pass. . . . There is a great scarcity of provisions in the centre of the city, as the Indians, who bring in everything from the country, are stopped. . . . While I am writing, the cannon are roaring almost without interruption. . . . [A] shell has just fallen in her [a neighbor's] garden. . . .

In the biggest cities high civil government and ecclesiastical officials, merchants, and wealthy mine owners and landowners and their families comprised the upper-classes. The mine owners and large landowners often chose to live the more comfortable urban life away from their holdings. Next in the hierarchy came professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, prosperous merchants, civil servants, industrialists, and other businesspeople, who comprised an upper middle class closely associated in outlook with the elites. Together these upper-classes accounted for roughly twenty percent of the population. The middle social sectors consisted of small shopkeepers, tradespeople, artisans, and the better-off skilled workers. At the bottom were unskilled workers, peddlers, artisans of low prestige trades, and others who lived at the margins of society, such as prostitutes and beggars (the latter often called léperos as well). It is likely that in the smaller cities the middle class was smaller than in Mexico City. Moreover, the middle sectors were closer to the lower classes in income and status than to the elites. Mexican society in this period could be described as a two-class construct with subtle, important gradations within each class.

By 1800 Mexico City was battered and bruised from rapid growth in population and urbanization. The city always appeared to be bursting its seams. With 137,000 people in 1800 and 168,846 in 1811, Mexico City was the largest city in the western hemisphere and the fifth largest city in the Western world. Half of its population was of Spanish descent, with the rest comprised of Indians, mixed bloods, and African Mexicans. During the next three decades through the 1850s the population of the city fluctuated between 160,000 and 205,000, as epidemics periodically caused precipitous drops in the population from which recovery was slow. Because of high mortality rates, migration from the countryside, rather than natural increase, continued to account for net population growth.

The population of the city increased by one-third during the second half of the eighteenth century as 40,000 people migrated from neighboring areas

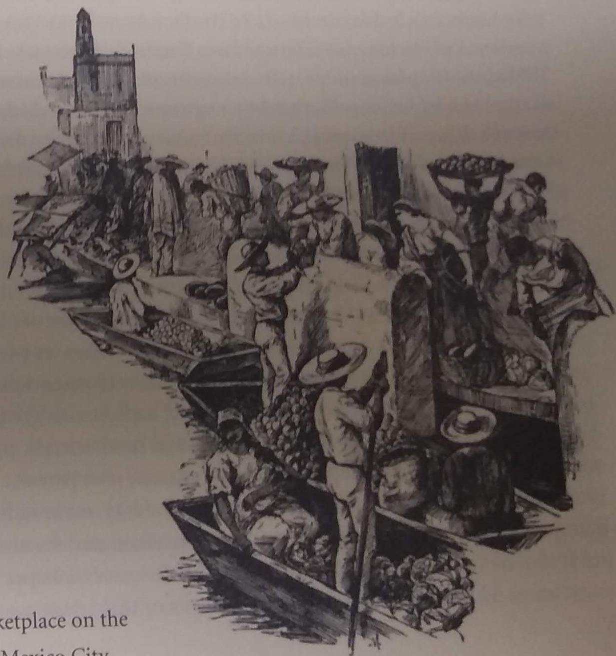
as a result of crop failures in the 1784–1787 and 1808–10 periods. Migratio
celerated with the encroachments of the haciendas on village lands in
regions. Growth continued at the rate of 1.4 percent a year after Independ
when the dislocations of war in the countryside sent more migrants to the
in search of shelter and employment.

Peons sometimes fled to the city to escape their debts. Bernardino Pe
for example, was an agricultural laborer who fled Monte Alto, when a 7-pe
debt swelled to 25. On his arrival in the capital he found work in a textile f
tory (*obraje*). After his former employer hunted him down, he borrow
enough money from his new boss to repay the old debt. Bernardino was ha
pily free from one burden, but, of course, he still owed a considerable sum

Vendor carries home artisan production

Women accounted for between 57 and 59 percent of Mexico City's inhabitants throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. They also made up the majority of migrants from the countryside. As with the men, almost all were castas or Indians who came from the densely populated regions around the capital. These women left their rural birthplaces in search of employment in industry or services. Most women migrants were single in the 15 to 29 age group.

Eighty percent of urban dwellers were either artisans or unskilled laborers and their families. Most capital residents were poor, and struggled mightily every day to survive. Wages were generally barely sufficient for subsistence and there was never enough steady employment. Only thirty percent had full-time jobs. Most of the employed were able to find only part-time work. The poor, as a result, lived wretched lives. They were always hungry, dressed in tatters, and resided in unsanitary dwellings. A third of their children died before



A busy marketplace on the outskirts of Mexico City

age three, and epidemics killed urban people in huge numbers. Petty co was a way of life.

The most common occupations were domestic service, manual labor, an artisan. Of the skilled workers, shoemakers, carpenters, and tailors were m common. Among the unskilled, the most numerous were bricklayers, d mestics, and street peddlers. The average daily salary was 0.5 to 1.0 peso (th peso was equal to the U.S. dollar until late in the century) for skilled work and 0.25 to 0.50 for unskilled workers, while the minimum daily cost of su sistence was 0.75 to 1.0 peso. Because of the stagnant economy and a labor su plus, wages did not significantly rise throughout the 1830s. A large numbe of tiny businesses supplied consumer goods; many conducted their commerc on blankets in the filthy main market. Most of the urban poor were outside the wage economy. Only 1.4 percent of city residents owned property.

Working conditions were sometimes horrendous, and working children often suffered mistreatment. Historian Frederick Shaw relates the plight of Loreto Flores's sixteen-year-old son during the 1850s. The young man worked long hours in a bakery in Mexico City. One evening he collapsed from ex- haustion, only to have his foreman force him back to his tasks by hitting him. The lad made up his mind to quit, only to be tricked by the administrator, who accused him of helping another boy to escape, and then docked him for the escapee's debts. Flores was jailed in the bakery and beaten. Another sad case in the 1820s was that of Cosmo Damián. At five his drunken father sold him to an obraje, where he worked endless hours for crusts of bread. His one day off a year was expensive, for he and the other workers paid for the celebration from their wages. Eventually he was set free by local authorities.

Income and wealth inequities were reflected in the social structure. One way to measure status in Mexico was to count the number of household ser- vants. Historian Silvia Arrom defines the upper-classes as people of inde- pendent wealth, such as prosperous merchants and miners, and top-level bureaucrats and clergy. This top four percent had on average three or four household servants. The middle class included intellectuals, professionals, merchants and businesspeople of modest means, government and private clerks, middle ranking militia officers and lower clergy, some independent ar- tisans, and small shopkeepers. The middle class accounted for about eighteen percent of all households and employed one or two servants per household.

Artisans, who comprised the upper echelons of the urban poor, struggled

increasingly after Independence, because Mexico's newly established govern- ment disbanded the protective associations, known as guilds, and opened up the domestic market to the competition of foreign manufactures. Many tex- tile trades, for example, suffered near collapse as a result of competition from large domestic clothing and fabric factories and foreign imports.

Cofradías provided some comfort for artisans in time of need. They originated in the guilds' obligation to develop the spiritual welfare of their members. Each one was dedicated to the performance of a specific religious function, usually the veneration of a saint. Their principal usefulness was in times of sickness or death. The cofradía would pay for the administration of sacraments, funeral and burial expenses, and certain widow and orphan benefits. Membership dues financed these functions. Unfortunately, only a minority of artisans and no laborers belonged.

Because of competition from foreign manufacturers, lack of an adequate domestic market, and insufficient local investment capital, Mexico City did not industrialize until late in the nineteenth century. Consequently, industrial jobs were scarce. There were thousands of small workshops, but these were mainly one-person operations, such as independent carpenters or masons.

There were some unusual jobs peculiar to the requirements of Mexico City. One such occupation was water carrier (*aguador*). The only available water in the city came from fountains, each of which had its aguadores who supplied neighborhoods that lacked fountains. From 6 A.M. to 11 P.M., the aguador car- ried huge jugs of water suspended from his head by rope, his hands holding two large ladles. Because he was illiterate, the aguador used colored beans to signify the amount of water each customer consumed. The aguador was often a beloved figure, because he treated the children to free drinks, dispensed local gossip, delivered letters, and acted as a jobs information center. He also drowned unwanted cats.

Thanks to the research of historian Silvia Arrom, we have a clearer picture of the plight of Mexico City's female residents during the three decades after Independence. A quarter of all women worked, comprising one-third of the workforce in the capital. Few upper-class women participated in the work- force. (Wealthy women had some economic influence, however, for at the time of Independence women owned about one-fourth of all privately held prop- erty in the capital.) Over a third of casta woman and almost half of all In- dian women worked. Nearly sixty percent of these women worked as domestic

servants. Twenty percent sold food from their homes, on the street, or
markets. Other occupations ran the gamut from midwives and healers to
dlers and waitresses. For about a decade, there was increased access to
san trades. Opportunities for women to work as artisans declined aga
mid-century.

Women fared no better than men in the conditions and remuneration
employment. Most were underemployed, and women were concentrated
the worst-paying occupations. Domestic service jobs were regarded by ma
women as humiliating. For the many who swallowed their pride, conditio
varied drastically. Some servants were treated well, and a few like family mem
bers. Servants as a general rule owed "submission, obedience, and respect"
employers. They were on call twenty-four hours a day, and were often pa
only room and board. There was also a hierarchy among domestic servant
At the top were the housekeepers, then kitchen maids, chambermaids, chil
dren's nurses, and laundresses. Because there were so many young wome
available for domestic service, the labor market precluded any improvemen
in conditions. Factories paid no better, although work there brought less dis
honor than domestic service. Conditions in the textile and tobacco industries,
other large employers of women, deteriorated considerably over the course
of the 1820s and 1830s. Women were not allowed into the clergy, military, or
government bureaucracy, which were, of course, the main paths to upward
mobility.

When women arrived in the city they remained surprisingly independent
and desperately poor. Slightly less than half were married. Because the census
of 1811 indicates a high proportion of single women in the 45 to 54 age group,
it is possible that many women never married. Eighty percent of women mar-
ried at some point in their lives, either in formal or informal unions. But most
spent only a small portion of their lives married. If they migrated from the
countryside, they delayed marriage. Because of the higher mortality rate
among men, it was likely that they would be widowed. Seventy percent of
married women between 45 and 54 had outlived their husbands. Rich or poor,
women spent much of their lives on their own.

According to Arrom's estimates, high mortality rates among men and chil-
dren left women with fewer children than one might expect. Many women
were widowed before their childbearing days ended. While an average woman
in the capital bore approximately five children, with infant mortality (death
before age three) estimated at twenty-seven percent, it was likely that she

would outlive at least one of them. Although two-thirds of adult women bore children, fewer than half of these women had children at home. One-third of adult women were single or widowed at the time of the censuses in 1811 and 1848.

Because a substantial proportion of Mexico City's women headed their own households as widows for much of their lives, they enjoyed a degree of independence and, perhaps, respect, if they were among the more well-to-do. This independence, of course, should not be exaggerated, for in many cases an adult son or son-in-law controlled the finances and negotiated with the outside world for the woman. Wealthy women were more likely to head their own households. Half of white women headed their own households in 1811, compared to only a third of casta or Indian women. Wealthy widows benefited from inheritance laws that forced the division of an estate among surviving spouse and children. The wife in these cases would always have at least some control over the estate. Because males commonly married late, the number of offspring was limited, thereby keeping the widow's share of the estate larger. These kinds of calculations, of course, were of no consequence to the poor. Women could barely subsist on their own. They had few alternatives to turning to men for support. Even then survival was uncertain. Children were the only form of old-age insurance; consequently, there were no worries about too many heirs.

Although it was less likely that married women would work because of social convention, economic necessity among the poor made working very likely. Men's incomes alone could not generally support an average family. Families simply would not survive without the woman's earnings. Marriage and motherhood did not end a woman's working career, but often may have led to a change in occupation. Domestic service was not an option, because it required living in a separate residence. In contrast, self-employment allowed women to care for their children while generating income. They could prepare food for sale, sew, operate small retail establishments, or peddle. Women dominated the local markets.

Marriage was an unequal institution. A wife was expected to accept submission to her husband and to "obey him in everything reasonable." Domestic violence was common. The double standard was widely practiced; that is, it was acceptable — to men, at least — that men could engage in extramarital relations, while women could not.

Conclusion

Everyday life in nineteenth-century Mexico was uncertain. The str
for food and shelter were unending and precarious. Common people, bo
the countryside and in the cities, simultaneously fought to assert and m
tain control over crucial aspects of their daily subsistence. They could no
late themselves, however, from either politics or broader social affairs.
next chapter is dedicated to their efforts to establish and maintain control
their own culture, traditions, politics, and economy in the midst of natio
instability, civil conflict, and foreign wars.

Chapter 2

THE POLITICS OF DISORDER, 1821–45

After eleven years of intermittent civil wars, Mexico gained its independence on September 27, 1821. On that day Agustín de Iturbide, a turncoat Spanish army officer, who forged an arrangement with rebel patriot leaders, led his victorious army into Mexico City. It may be indicative of how Mexicans eventually came to view the event that the nation's Independence Day is celebrated on September 16, the day when Father Miguel Hidalgo proclaimed Mexican independence in his Cry of Dolores (*El Grito de Dolores*) in 1810, rather than the anniversary of Iturbide's triumph. Hidalgo ultimately failed leading a mass popular movement, while Iturbide prevailed in a backroom deal.

The foundation of the new nation was shaky from the beginning. Independence resulted from an arrangement between royalist army officer Iturbide and the surviving rebel leadership, Vicente Guerrero and Guadalupe Victoria. The agreement was based on "The Three Guarantees": Roman Catholicism would be the religion of the country, with no toleration of other faiths; *criollos* (creoles, white Spaniards born in New Spain) and *peninsulares* (white Spaniards born in Spain) would be equal under the law; and the form of government would be a constitutional monarchy. A new army, combining royalist and rebel forces, was to oversee the implementation of the plan.

The deal makers' original intent was for Mexico to obtain a monarch from a European royal family. The first choice was Ferdinand VII of Spain, who had presided over the disastrous loss of his nation's empire. This was a curious preference. Fortunately, Ferdinand was unwilling. When no other European

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For this chapter I am deeply indebted to the works of the following: Timothy Anna, Michael Costeloe, Thomas Cotner, Torcuato DiTella, Michael Ducey, Don Dumond, Will Fowler, Stanley Green, Peter Guardino, Terry Ruggeley, Frank Samponaro, Pedro Santoni, William Sprague, Donald Stevens, Barbara Tenenbaum, and Richard Warren.

prince came forth, Iturbide crowned himself Emperor Agustín I on
1822. His colorful reign lasted less than a year. A revolt led by a then-
brigadier general, Antonio López de Santa Anna, forced the flounder
peror to abdicate in March 1823.

If It Was Chaos, Why?

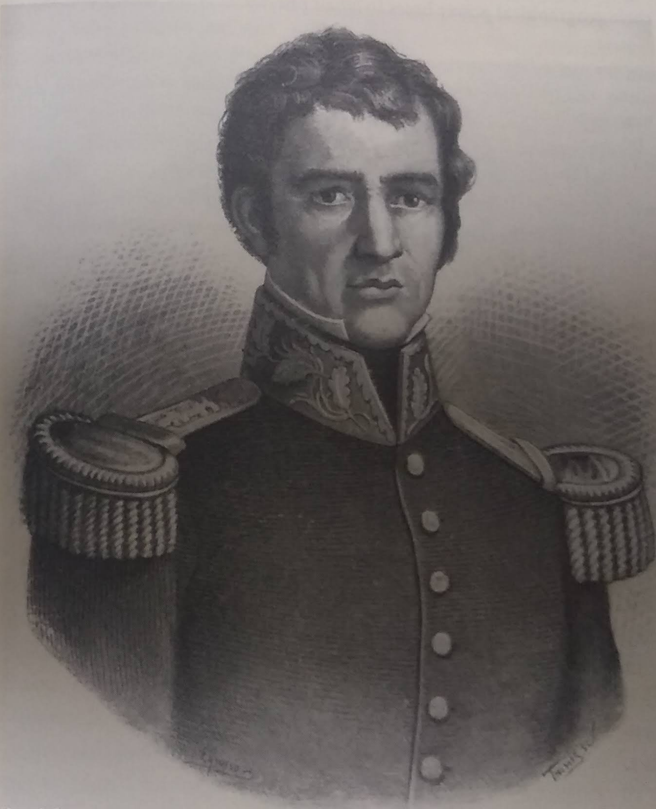
In the first decades of Independence, Mexicans were unable to reach
sensus about two crucial questions: what form of government was most
able for Mexico, and who should rule? As a result, the rebellion ag
Iturbide initiated a long period of turbulence in national government.
tween 1824 and 1857, Mexico had 16 presidents and 33 provisional chief ex
utives, for a total of 49 national administrations. Guadalupe Victoria, the
elected president, was the only president to finish his term (1824–29). Cabi
secretaries proved even more transient. The war ministry changed leaders
times, the foreign ministry 57 times, and the justice ministry 61 times. The a
erage tenure for a cabinet officer was only seven months. These figures mo
certainly point to a high degree of political turmoil. However, the questio
of what constitutes stability or instability is debatable, for there were severa
underlying elements of stability.

Throughout this period, the military dominated the highest echelons of the
national government. Only six civilians served as president of the nation be-
tween 1821 and 1851, while fifteen generals held the highest office. Three of the
civilian presidents lasted only a few days. In addition, there was continuity
in leadership. Anastasio Bustamante, Antonio López de Santa Anna, Valen-
tín Gómez Farías, Nicolás Bravo, and José Joaquín de Herrera each served in
the presidency on three or more separate occasions. Anastasio Bustamante
held the position for the longest consecutive period: four and a half years of
an eight-year term (called for in the centralist Constitution of 1836) from 1837
to 1841. Santa Anna was chief executive eleven times. Together Bustamante and
Santa Anna occupied the presidency for approximately half of the first thirty
years. Consequently, there was a measure of stability, despite the fact that
terms were abbreviated.

Despite the high turnover in the cabinet, there also may have been a sig-
nificant degree of continuity in these offices as well. The same people from an
elite known as hombres de bien ("good people"; see below) served again and
again and provided the underlying stability of politics beneath the surface of

revolving governments. In many cases the same men served in various ca-
pacities in several different administrations.

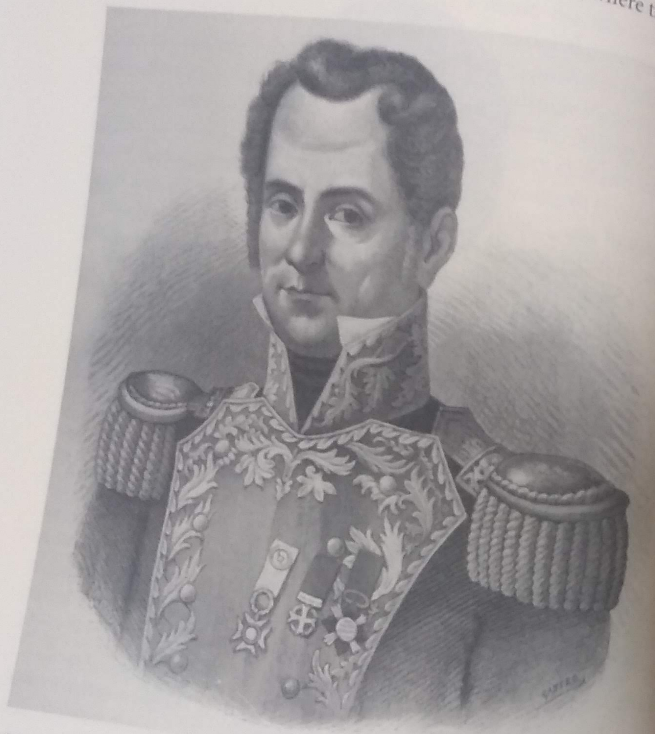
Mexican politics were conducted on three levels—national, state, and
local—all of which influenced each other, but none of which dominated. At
the national level, the hombres de bien, a small group of men from a relatively
homogeneous background, mostly well-educated professionals and military
officers, contested in "gentlemanly" fashion for control over the central gov-



Guadalupe Victoria

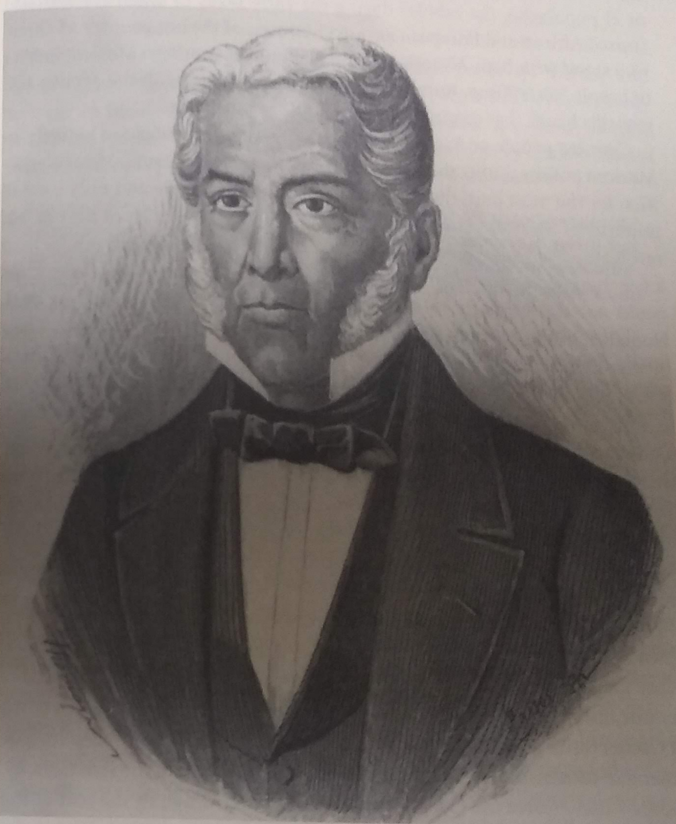
ernment. They plotted, rebelled, legislated, and debated among themse
Mexico City. They argued incessantly over alternative political and econ
systems: federalism or centralism, liberalism or conservatism, free trad
protectionism, and pro-clericalism or anti-clericalism. Working always be
the scenes, the *agiotistas* (moneylenders), who furnished the national g
ernment with its operating funds, also exerted considerable influence.

On the second level, state politics were largely in the hands of the notab
regionally prominent landowning and merchant families who competed fr
their geographical power bases in small provincial cities, where they do



Anastasio Bustamante

nated the municipal governments. Rivalries among notables were often quite heated. At the local level in the countryside, each village had its own leadership. These rural people, usually of quite modest means, vied for control over tax levies and access to land. At both the state and local levels, rivals fought about what mattered in their everyday lives. The connecting link between the national and local levels was the issue of local and regional (state) autonomy



Juan Álvarez

as opposed to centralized authority. This was manifested in the na
debate between federalism and centralism.

None of the three groups was isolated from each other nor from the
of the outside world. Political elites at all levels sometimes sought al
with rural people and, on rarer occasions, with the urban poor. These al
could be crucial in determining national political outcomes, such as
Iturbide found support among Mexico City's urban poor (known as lé
or el populacho, the rabble) during the early 1820s or when the m
(mixed African and European ancestry) farmers of the hot country of G
rero stood with Juan Álvarez, the political boss of southern Mexico, in
to topple Santa Anna. Rural people were the soldiers in all the armies a
guerrilla bands that contested national and regional politics.

Country people and lower-class urban dwellers participated actively i
Mexican politics during the early nineteenth century. To be sure, Mexican po
itics, for the most part, did not involve the mass of people and only a sma
minority of Mexicans engaged in the debates and conspiracies of the era. N
revolt attracted widespread adherents, nor did any rebellion require more tha
a few thousand soldiers. And almost certainly, the vast majority of Mexicans
could not do much more than to pay attention to their daily survival.
Nonetheless, the popular classes attempted to exert their political will. Their
methods and goals varied considerably. Country people sided with factions of
notables. Sometimes they took up arms against the notables when they sought
to protect or extend their village lands. Mexico City dwellers rioted for cheaper
food or in defense of their city against foreign intruders. The first five decades
after Independence provided an unprecedented opportunity for the lower
classes in some (we do not have documentation for all) regions to exert sig-
nificant influence over the institutions that helped lay out the pattern of their
everyday lives and an even rarer opportunity to determine the path of nation
building.

The basis of multi-class political participation was the Constitution of 1824,
which reinforced the notion of democracy by proclaiming all Mexicans equal
before the law. Although the qualifications for voting were much debated at
the time, there were no restrictions on the vote (for males) until 1836, when
the Conservative government cut the voting population by sixty percent. The
vulnerable consensus that produced Iturbide's coalition and the federalist as-
cendancy that created the Constitution of 1824 broke down by the end of the
decade. Never far beneath the surface was the deeply instilled fear of the
masses held by the hombres de bien. The elite's memory of the nightmare of

Father Hidalgo's mob killing Spaniards in 1810 and 1811 tainted nineteenth-century Mexican politics. The Parián riot of 1828, which erupted in Mexico City in support of the presidential candidacy of Vicente Guerrero, added to this distrust, when 5,000 "insolent plebes" assaulted and robbed the exclusive shops in the central square. Though it lasted only twenty-four hours, the uprising shook the city's rich to their core.

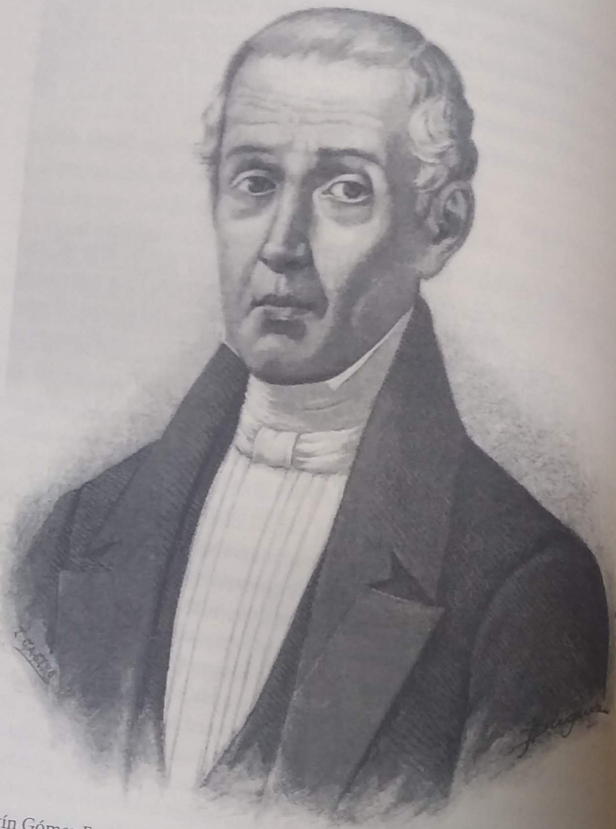
Hombres de Bien

The hombres de bien were people of education, property, "virtue," and "honor." Their views encompassed the political spectrum. They commonly believed in their own qualifications to run the nation and almost all mistrusted the masses. Thus, they advocated limiting suffrage by qualification of income. Radical Liberal Valentín Gómez Farías put it this way:

> You would want all the classes in our society represented in congress; in my opinion, that has a serious drawback because the classes are so varied and diverse and very few of them have people of sufficient aptitude and understanding to be able to carry out the arduous and difficult task which has to be entrusted to their care.

Despite the existence of considerable racial prejudice, some men of mixed blood entered the ranks of the hombres de bien, though this was not commonplace. The typical hombre de bien was born at the end of the eighteenth century to a well-to-do family. He went to Roman Catholic Church schools, where he learned theology and law. He earned his living from the practice of his profession and, perhaps, a modest inheritance or rents from rural property. With an income of approximately 1,000 pesos a year, he maintained a comfortable lifestyle. The hombre de bien probably rented an apartment (likely from the Church, for it was the city's largest landlord) in downtown Mexico City, and had three or four household servants. He was well dressed in the latest European fashions. A man about town, he would have frequented trendy cafes and restaurants in the city. Some obtained positions in the national government, which paid little, but added to their personal status.

Most important to the hombre de bien was social standing. Ideology was not nearly as important as class solidarity. He feared unrestricted suffrage more than anything, for in his worldview the poor and illiterate deserved no say in government, nor did they have any inherent right to full citizenship. A government of the people, he believed, would lead only to violence and ruin.



Valentín Gómez Farías

Members of this elite advocated what they thought was best for the masses and did not shy from articulating the will of the people (without consulting them). There were personal ties, as well as political alliances. There were grudges, family rivalries, and friendships. But all was within the bounds of an old boys' network. No matter how bitter the political debate, it was underlaid with class solidarity.

The Military

Almost all Mexican presidents during the nineteenth century were military officers. (The most notable exceptions, as we will see, would be the presidents of the Reform era, Benito Juárez and Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada.) The dominant political personalities of the years from 1821 to 1854—Santa Anna, Bustamante, and Gómez Farías—were well-respected military officers, each of whom had fought initially against Mexican independence. The military was arguably the most important institution in Mexican society prior to 1880. Because of the constant threat of war, no Mexican politician could easily reduce the military in size or importance. Consequently, the army absorbed an enormous portion of the nation's resources.

The military was also a critical social force, because it provided a means for upward mobility for castas since the wars of Independence. This institution was particularly difficult to control due to its special privileges, the most important of which was the *fuero* or right of members of the military to be tried in a court of their peers, which put soldiers beyond the reach of civilian jurisdiction. From the beginning, the army was conservative and centralist with most of the officer corps coming from the ranks of the royalist army. Throughout the era federalists advocated the formation of popular militias controlled by the states to counterbalance the centralist national military.

In the mid-1820s there were officially 58,000 men in the army. But this army existed only on paper. To meet the Spanish invasion in 1829 the Mexican government could muster only 8,000 soldiers. The army was top heavy with officers, expensive, and inefficient. In the mid-1830s there were 13 divisional generals and 18 brigadiers with combined salaries of 159,000 pesos a year. Military expenditures sometimes surpassed treasury revenues. The Bustamante regime, for example, sought to win over the military by purchasing new equipment, and between 1830 and 1832 spent 10 million pesos on the army, even though no foreign invasions threatened. In 1836 the military spent an aver-

age of 600,000 pesos a month, while government revenues amou
430,000 pesos a month. The Texas campaign added another 200,000 pe
month to the deficit. In 1845 there were at least 535 infantry and cavalry
cers, 29 of whom were generals, paid 820,830 pesos by the governmen
though they were furloughed. Generally speaking, there was little to show
vast military expenditures, for the Mexican army did not fight well again
Spanish in 1829, the Texans in 1836, or the French in 1838.

Country People

Country people who lived in villages or owned their own land were
most likely to have political impact. Villages had their own leadership, se
of identity, and collected their own taxes and regulated access to land. Th
were most powerful in regions where large estates were absent and villag
controlled most of the land. Villages everywhere in Mexico were quite capa
ble of seeking recourse through informal political networks, such as local p
trons or intermediaries; through formal government, such as the courts; o
through violence.

From 1820 to 1880 villagers and small landholders held the balance of powe
in many areas. They influenced events by joining with regional and nationa
factions at crucial times. Because they were virtually autonomous in some re
gions, they rejected and modified laws passed by state and national govern
ments of which they disapproved. Country people fought fiercely to retain and
extend the rights they possessed. Though circumstances varied widely ac
cording to region, the early republic was an era of opportunity in the sense
that country people actively competed for control of local governments.

It was no accident that centralists' first target, when they took power in 1836,
was local autonomy. Centralists wanted to limit the influence of country peo-
ple, so they severely restricted suffrage by raising annual income requirements
for voter eligibility and reduced the number of municipalities. As a result,
taxes increased drastically. Centralists appointed local justices of the peace,
who carried out many of the duties previously the responsibility of town
councils. But the central government was unable to provide a corps of offi-
cials sufficiently numerous, educated, and motivated to enforce its will in the
countryside without major concessions to the rural population. Nor could it
afford a bureaucracy and military large enough to enforce centralization.
Thus, village communities persisted with most of their rights and prerogatives
intact until the mid-1880s.

The Hero Presidents: Victoria and Guerrero

The Constitution of 1824 organized the government into executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Presidents were elected for four-year terms and were not eligible for immediate reelection. Rather than through direct vote, presidents were elected by state legislatures; each state had one vote. The candidate with the second highest vote became vice president. Congress had two houses. Each state had two senators elected for four-year terms. Population count determined the number of each state's representatives to the lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, whose members served two-year terms. Towns and cities were governed by town councils (*ayuntamientos*), consisting of a mayor and six councilors.

Three factions, soon reduced to two, dominated the political scene in the 1820s. First, there were the Iturbidistas, followers of the deposed emperor, who were drawn from the old colonial nobility, church officials, army officers, and the rabble of Mexico City (léperos). Second, the centralists (see introduction) favored a strong national government. And third, the federalists envisioned strong states and a weak national government. It is difficult to determine the precise class make-up of the latter two factions, because both had large landowners, merchants, and industrialists among their ranks. The majority of centralists were from large urban centers. Federalists came from the peripheral states, most notably in the north. The federalists initially gained the upper hand after the fall of Iturbide.

After a short interval (1823–24) during which a three-person executive ruled while the new federalist constitution was written, Guadalupe Victoria (1789–1843), one of the heroes of the Independence wars, won election as the first president of Mexico in 1824. Although Victoria was careful not to favor either federalists or centralists, he could not prevent their heated competition. Financial difficulties haunted the Victoria administration, though with the help of loans obtained from Great Britain, Victoria remained in office to the end of his term.

The seemingly natural successor to Victoria was fellow Independence hero Vicente Guerrero (1782–1831). The son of "a poor farm couple, of mixed Spanish, Indian, and probably Negro ancestry," Guerrero had fought under Father José María Morelos and was, by his own claim, a veteran of nearly 500 battles. He had won additional popularity when he defeated an uprising against Victoria in 1828. Guillermo Prieto, an acute observer of the times described him as follows:

He was rather tall in stature . . . had a swarthy complexion,
heaped on his forehead, and black penetrating eyes with an
gentleness. His whiskers were well grown, his mouth, contracted
cere. . . . Although modest, his manners were not retiring. His high
musical voice repelled one at first impression. Near him, one
goodness of his soul. . . .

Nonetheless, a rival to Guerrero arose in Manuel Gómez Pedraza,
support of the hombres de bien, who feared having someone they
part of the rabble as president. After a mudslinging election, Gómez
emerged the winner by a narrow margin. Santa Anna was unwilling
Gómez Pedraza, a personal enemy, to take office and led a small-scale
lion that overturned the election results. After Victoria completed his
Guerrero succeeded him in April 1829. Notoriously ill–at ease among the
reaucrats of the capital, the general inherited a bankrupt government
handicapped by the belief of many Mexicans that it was illegitimate.
less than a year in office, Guerrero abolished slavery in Mexico and de
Spain's foolhardy attempt to reconquer Mexico in 1829. Despite these ac
plishments, his own vice–president, Anastasio Bustamante, ousted Guerr
on the first day of 1830.

The 1820s were a time of unparalleled political participation by the mas
In Mexico City the lower classes voted in elections to an unprecedented
tent. Iturbide had built his political base from the urban lower classes and
military. The lower classes of the capital adored him for ridding the na
of the hated Spaniards. The urban poor took to the streets in 1823 in a fu
effort to prevent the emperor's overthrow by Santa Anna. Iturbide refused
lead the mob, although it was his only chance to retain his throne. In the end
his class loyalty superseded personal ambition.

The casta Guerrero's rise epitomized the possibilities of upward mobili
for the lower classes. And it was during his presidency that the political par-
ticipation of the urban lower classes reached its peak. Urban workers voted in
support of tariffs to protect artisan and manufacturing jobs against inexpen-
sive foreign imports.

Widespread agitation and a heavy voter turnout during the elections of 1828
frightened Moderates and Conservatives to the point that in late 1829 they
overthrew Guerrero. The hombres de bien believed in their hearts that Mex-
ican society was on the edge of breaking down.

Anastasio Bustamante (1780–1853)

Historians have generally ignored Anastasio Bustamante despite his having led Mexico for approximately seven years. Born of poor Spanish parents in Michoacán in 1780, he was educated in a seminary and later studied medicine. After a short stint as a doctor (without a degree), he joined the military. Like so many of the early leaders of the republic, he began as a soldier for Spain during the Independence wars who fought against the insurgents, and switched sides with Iturbide in 1821. As a favorite of the emperor, he reached the rank of field marshal. Bustamante ascended to the presidency, when, after serving briefly as vice president under Vicente Guerrero for seven months in 1829, he rebelled and ousted him. Contemporary Guillermo Prieto described Bustamante as of "medium build, plump, round faced with small eyes, with a broad forehead and rather pursed lips, and with a tendency to strut about splay-footed or with the toes pointed outward."

Bustamante professed no political allegiance and therefore drew the enmity of both centralists and federalists. Much like Santa Anna, with whom he alternated as president for a time, Bustamante was most successful as a political survivor. His years in office were turbulent. Almost immediately, he faced a year-long rebellion led by overthrown president Guerrero, which ended only when Guerrero was captured and executed in February 1831.

Juan Álvarez

Juan Álvarez, who ruled unchallenged as the political boss of much of the south and southwest of the nation, was the dominant political figure in Mexico outside the capital in the first half century after Independence. A mestizo, Álvarez had an unlucky youth, for the executor of his father's estate cheated him of his inheritance. After a stint as a cowherd, he fought on the side of the insurgents in the 1810s. Wounded several times, he spent much of the war recuperating. As a result of his injuries, Álvarez needed crutches to walk, but could still ride a horse skillfully. He returned to war, leading insurgents on the southwest coast during the last years of the rebellion, rising in rank to colonel.

Following the Independence wars, he acquired a large estate and expanded his political base among the mulatto militia of the Costa Grande. His true skill was in organizing larger movements. Álvarez represented the concerns of the southern small farmers for local autonomy. By far the most enduring of Mex-

ico's regional bosses, Álvarez held sway in the south until 1868. Though never reached the revered national status of his contemporaries like Victoria, and Nicolás Bravo, his control and influence, though geographically limited to the south, would last longer.

Álvarez, as much as any political figure of the era from 1821 to 1855, mized the regional foundations of Mexican politics. First and foremost guarded his base in Guerrero; the nation was secondary among his concerns.

Liberal Interregnum, 1832–34

Bustamante lasted until the waning days of 1832, when Santa Anna deposed him. In March 1833 Santa Anna was elected president and Gómez Farías vice president. Santa Anna left governance to Gómez Farías, preferring to maintain his regional power base and his army in Veracruz. Over the course of a tumultuous year Gómez Farías and the radical Liberals attacked the pillars of Conservatism: the government bureaucracy, the Church, and the military. The radicals tried to change the nation's political culture by eliminating thousands of people from their government posts, reaching down to the municipal level. They inflicted a major blow on the Church, when in 1833 they abolished the tithe (which had obligated people to pay one-tenth of their yearly income to the Church), the Church's largest source of revenue. They also tried to limit the power of the army. The radicals' heyday was short lived, because they alienated the army and the Church without winning popular support, despite their concerted efforts to mobilize the lower classes. The radicals lost the crucial support of the hombres de bien, who feared lower-class participation in politics. Santa Anna ended the radical reforms when he returned to office in 1834.

The Conservative Ascendancy, 1834–46

Santa Anna met his demise in Texas. The humiliation of his defeat forced him from the political stage. While Santa Anna was losing vast territories in the north, centralists in the national congress in 1836 engineered and adopted a new constitution that became known as the Seven Laws (Siete Leyes), which limited suffrage, strengthened the executive, and limited local political autonomy. The most important of the new laws restricted voting rights to men with high incomes, effectively excluding the vast majority of the Mexican people from voting and public office. The new Constitution changed the presi-

dential term to eight years and permitted reelection. The central government was to appoint state governors. Governors were to name prefects to administer the municipalities. The Siete Leyes' limitations on mass participation in politics showed clearly that the fear of the people by the hombres de bien had triumphed.

Anastasio Bustamante was the obvious Conservative choice for president. Taking office in early 1837, again he walked a tightrope while attempting to balance the demands and plots by radical Liberals and Conservatives. A bizarre episode known as the Pastry War further undermined him. Frustrated because its citizens (one of whom was the owner of a bakery in Sonora, hence the Pastry War) were unable to gain restitution for losses suffered in one of Mexico's many revolts, France sent a naval squadron to Veracruz. When the Mexican government ignored the gesture, the angry French blockaded the port. Bustamante, displeased with his military commanders in Veracruz, ordered Santa Anna, then at home near Jalapa only a short march away, to take command. Santa Anna became a hero when he suffered a severe wound in a skirmish with the French and, ever the masterful publicist, turned this escapade to his political advantage. Restored to glory, the hero Santa Anna loomed like a dark shadow over Bustamante.

Over the next year, Mexico appeared on the brink of political and fiscal disintegration. The coalition of the hombres de bien, the Church, and the army, which had supported the centralist regime, came apart. In one wild week in July 1839, radicals staged a coup in Mexico City, turning the Zocalo into a shooting gallery with an artillery battle, while roving bands looted the city. Bustamante survived the incident, but forever lost the confidence of the horrified hombres de bien. Santa Anna sent him into exile in 1841.

Santa Anna's comeback was rather remarkable, given the fact that he was widely regarded as a venal, unprincipled, untrustworthy opportunist. We cannot underestimate Santa Anna's political skills, his charisma, or his enormous energy. The general had won the military's support by carefully courting military leaders over the years with promotions, raises, and praise. Santa Anna was also a master of patronage, using lucrative government concessions to purchase allies. He also benefited from the mistaken belief on the part of the hombres de bien that they could control him. Although the general had proven this a wrong-headed assumption in the past, the good men in their arrogance stuck with their illusion.

The triumphant Santa Anna closed Congress in 1842 and ruled by decree until the end of 1844. He pushed through a new constitution, the Organic

Bases (Bases Orgánicas), which shortened the presidential term to five
broadened presidential powers, and narrowed the franchise even further
contemporary called it "constitutional despotism." As always, Santa Anna
wore out his welcome. He alienated all sectors of society with his outrag
personal behavior, marrying a fifteen-year-old girl only weeks after the de
of his wife of nineteen years. In late 1844 Santa Anna's popularity had
to a new low, when an angry mob dug up his amputated leg and dragge
through the streets of Mexico City to great laughter. The rioters sho
"Death to the Cripple: long live Congress." By January 1845 Santa Anna w
exile again.

The hombres de bien first turned to one of their own, José Joaquín de H
rera, a moderate Liberal. Herrera subsequently won election to the presiden
only to be overthrown in the days leading to the war with the United Sta
because he tried to negotiate a peaceful settlement.

During the 1840s Mexico nearly disintegrated. War with the United Sta
(1846–48) and the resultant loss of half the national territory was only th
most dramatic of its troubles. Infuriated by the intrusions of the centralize
government and the diminution of local autonomy, the countryside erupted
Rural people took up arms to assert control over their everyday lives. Whe
Maya Indians in Yucatán rose in the so-called Caste War in 1847, they near
forced their white and mestizo tormenters from the peninsula. In areas lik
Guerrero country people obtained a considerable measure of autonomy.

Seemingly at the height of its power, centralism had broken down. Severel
limiting the franchise and cutting the number of municipalities backfired, cre-
ating exactly the outcome that the centralist conservatives had feared all along.
The war with the United States forced the government to raise taxes, evok-
ing more bitter protests. Country people, upset with local issues, such as land,
taxes, and conscription, sought and found allies among the badly fragmented
regional and national political factions. Regional notables were ready and will-
ing to take advantage of the weakness of the central government in order to
extend their autonomy. Notables and small landowners and villages in some
areas thus became allies against the centralists. In Yucatán local leaders, known
as *batabs*, led the rebellion that turned into the Caste War. Centralists had left
only one road open for the people of the countryside, rich and poor, to in-
fluence the political process: violence. Twenty years of mass violence followed.

Chapter 3

THE ORIGINS OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

During the six decades after Independence Mexico fell into prolonged economic stagnation. The worst conditions occurred before 1850. Per capita annual income fell more than 50 percent, from 116 pesos in 1800 to 56 pesos in 1845. There were several causes for the new nation's economic difficulties. First, Mexico was almost constantly at war from 1810 to 1877. The Wars of Independence ravaged the nation from 1810 to 1821. There followed four foreign invasions and an unending succession of civil wars. The worst, the War of the Reform, lasted for three bloody years (1857–60). The wars also resulted in the loss of half of the nation's territory, incalculable destruction, and nonproductive consumption of huge quantities of human and capital resources. War disrupted commercial and capital markets, exacerbated uncertainties, and discouraged long-range investment and planning.

Second, Mexico's lack of inexpensive transportation and easy communications added vastly to the cost of production and stymied the creation of national and regional markets. Mexico's topography made it very expensive to construct an extensive road network. Existing roads were in disrepair and not suitable for wagons. Many were impassable during the rainy season. There were no rivers running through major population centers to provide low-cost transportation. (The Ohio-Mississippi-Missouri River system provided such transport alternatives for the United States.) The largest cities were located inland and thus unable to take advantage of inexpensive shipping by sea. (Many of South America's major cities, such as Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Rio

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