

El Cinco de Mayo

The Cinco de Mayo has its roots in the French occupation of Mexico, which took place in the aftermath of the MexicanAmerican War of 184648 and the 185861 Reform War. The Reform War was a civil war which pitted Liberals (who believed in separation of church and state, and freedom of religion) against the Conservatives (who favored a tight bond between the Roman Catholic Church and the Mexican State). These wars nearly bankrupted the Mexican Treasury. On July 17, 1861, Mexican President Benito Juárez issued a moratorium in which all foreign debt payments would be suspended for two years. In response, Britain, France, and Spain sent naval forces to Veracruz to demand reimbursement. Britain and Spain negotiated with Mexico and withdrew, but France, at the time ruled by Napoleon III, decided to use the opportunity to establish an empire in Mexico that would favor French interests, the Second Mexican Empire. The empire was part of an envisioned "Latin America" (term used to imply cultural kinship of the region with France) that would rebuild French influence in the American continent and exclude Anglophone American territories.

Late in 1861, a well‑armed French fleet stormed Veracruz, landing a large French force and driving President Juárez and his government into retreat. Moving on from Veracruz towards Mexico City, the French army encountered heavy resistance from the Mexicans close to Puebla, at the Mexican forts of Loreto and Guadalupe. The French army of 6,000 attacked the poorly equipped Mexican army of 4,000. On May 5, 1862, the Mexicans decisively defeated the French army. The victory represented a significant morale boost to the Mexican army and the Mexican people at large and helped establish a sense of national unity and patriotism.

Cinco de Mayo is more celebrated by Mexicans in the United States than by Mexicans in Mexico.