

The Triumph of the Republic, 1867 (1867)

Benito Juárez

The Liberal victory over Maximilian in 1867 was a source of patriotic pride for many Mexicans, but it was also widely interpreted as the definitive victory of republicanism in Mexico. In the following selection a triumphant Juárez issues a stirring proclamation to the Mexican people on July 15, 1867. The brief and eloquent proclamation is redolent with meanings. First, it celebrates the nation's will to survive the darkest night in its young history. During Mexico's longest foreign occupation since Bourbon times, Juárez himself became a national icon, an indomitable, peripatetic figure who kept the idea of a sovereign republic alive, sometimes only a few leagues ahead of the Empire's pursuing forces in his simple black coach. Second, the proclamation signals Juárez's determination to transcend the bitter, internecine conflict between Liberals and Conservatives that had undermined the republic's entire existence. The challenge, he points out, is to reconcile justice with national reconciliation. An example was made of Maximilian and two of his top generals, who were executed under the law, but there would be no further rounds of vengeance against fellow Mexicans. Finally, the reader will detect a certain irony in this declaration. Juárez pledges himself to uphold Mexico's free republican institutions, emphasizing that henceforth the Mexican people will be the arbiters of their fate. How ironic that Juárez's subsequent Restored Republic (1867-1872), which would usher in an era of sustained growth and stability, would also witness the creation of a formidable Juarista Liberal political machine. In laying the groundwork for both a modernizing economy and an authoritarian central state, Benito Juárez was the precursor of Mexico's quintessential order and progress caudillo, Porfirio Díaz.

Mexicans: The national Government today returns to establish its residence in the City of Mexico, from which it fled four years ago. At that time it made a resolution never to abandon its duties, which were all the more sacred when the nation's conflict was the greatest. It did this with the clear confidence that the Mexican people would fight unceasingly against the iniquitous foreign invasion, in defense of their rights and their freedom. The Government fled so that it could sustain the banner of the fatherland for as long as necessary,



Despite his stirring rhetoric about republicanism, Benito Juárez became increasingly autocratic in the later years of his government, and the system grew increasingly corrupt. In this cartoon, drawn by Santiago Hernández, pesos from the national treasury drop ballots into an electoral urn held by Juárez and his finance minister. The caption beneath the cartoon contains one of President Juárez's more unfortunate turns of phrase: "Go tell the people that they have voted and that thus speaks the Supreme Government." (Originally published in *La Orquesta*, June 30, 1869)

until it obtained the triumph of the holy cause of independence and of the institutions of the Republic.

The good sons of Mexico have achieved this triumph, fighting alone, without anyone's help, without resources, without the elements necessary for war. They have shed their blood with sublime patriotism, making every sacrifice, for they would never consent to the loss of the Republic and of their freedom.

In the name of the grateful fatherland, I pay tribute to the good Mexicans who have defended it, and to their worthy leaders. The triumph of the fatherland, which has been the object of their noble aspirations, shall always be their greatest claim to glory and the best reward for their heroic efforts.

With full confidence in the people, the Government complied with its duties, without ever once thinking it licit to reduce any of the rights of the nation. The Government has fulfilled the first of its duties by not contracting any compromise overseas or in the interior of the country which could prejudice in any way the independence and sovereignty of the Republic, the integrity of its territory, or the respect due to the Constitution and laws. Its enemies tried to establish another government and other laws, but they were

unable to realize their criminal intentions. After four years, the Government returns to the City of Mexico, with the banner of the Constitution and with the same laws, without having ceased to exist for a single instant within the national territory.

The Government does not wish, has never wished—especially now, in the hour of the complete triumph of the Republic—to allow itself to be inspired by any sentiment of passion against the enemies that it has fought. Its duty has been, and is, to weigh the demands of justice with all of the considerations of mercy. The restrained nature of its conduct in all of the places where it has resided has demonstrated its desire to moderate as far as possible the rigor of justice, conciliating indulgence with its strict duty to apply the laws as far as is necessary to secure the peace and future of the nation.

Mexicans: We direct all our strength to obtain and consolidate the benefits of peace. Under the Government's auspices, the protection of the laws and the authorities shall effectively ensure the rights of all of the inhabitants of the Republic.

The people and government must respect the rights of everyone. Among individuals as among nations, peace means respect for the rights of others.

We have confidence that all Mexicans, taught by the prolonged and dolorous experience of the calamities of war, will henceforth cooperate for the well-being and prosperity of the nation, which can only be achieved with inviolable respect for the laws and with the obedience of the authorities elected by the people.

In our free institutions, the Mexican people are the arbiters of their fate. With the sole aim of sustaining the cause of the people during the war, while they were unable to elect their leaders, I have had to, in accordance with the spirit of the Constitution, retain the power that was conferred upon me. Now that the struggle is ended, my duty is to convoke the people at once so that, with no pressure or illegitimate influence upon them, they may choose with absolute freedom the person to whom they wish to entrust their fate.

Mexicans: We have achieved the greatest good that we can desire, having consummated for the second time the independence of our fatherland. We shall all cooperate so that we will be able to bequeath prosperity to our children, loving and sustaining always our independence and our freedom.