

## TIMELINE

### The Age of Civil Wars

- 1853–55 Santa Anna's last presidency
- 1854 Liberal revolt against Santa Anna
- 1855–61 Reform Era
- 1857 Constitution (Liberal)
- 1857–60 War of the Reform
- 1858–72 Presidency of Benito Juárez
- 1861 Tripartite Intervention (France, Great Britain, Spain)
- 1862 Cinco de Mayo (defeat of French at Puebla)
- 1861–67 French Intervention
- 1864–67 Maximilian
- 1867 Election of Benito Juárez as president
- 1871 Reelection of Juárez
- 1872 Death of Juárez
- 1872–76 Presidency of Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada

## Chapter 5

### POLITICS AND ECONOMY IN CIVIL WAR, 1848–61

**T**he disastrous war with the United States caused a reevaluation of Mexican politics and political ideology. Two of the major groups, who had ruled in both centralist and federalist regimes, the army and the *hombres de bien*, were badly shaken. Humiliating defeat discredited the army. Emerging from the national debacle, Mexico's political debates reconfigured around Conservatism and Liberalism (see introduction). Members of each faction were convinced that their way was the best for the nation. Their conflict was irresolvable other than by bloodshed. It would take a vicious civil war (the War of the Reform) and a destructive foreign intervention before a new generation of Liberals emerged victorious. The War of the Reform from 1857 to 1860 marked, perhaps, a second watershed (Independence was the first) in the history of modern Mexico, because it not only ushered in a new age dominated by Liberalism, but also ended the transitional period of change from the colonial era's semi-feudal economy to a capitalist market economy.

#### The Liberals

There are two conflicting views held by historians of the Liberals at mid-century. One holds that they were an isolated minority, who, as a modernizing elite, were set on imposing new institutions and values on an either uncomprehending or recalcitrant population. The second maintains that because local issues, such as political autonomy, taxes, the draft, and access to

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land were so important, Liberals, who advocated federalism, attracted widespread popular support at the grassroots. Villagers guarding their prerogatives were moved to join Liberal ranks, because the Liberals defended state and local rights. Liberals organized locally based militia units, which formed the core of their popular base. There is no question, however, that in some areas Liberal policies elicited violent opposition from country people, who objected to the Liberal Reform Laws and Constitution of 1857, because they called for the destruction of the institution of communal landholding. In the end, however, the Liberals won over the majority of the lower classes, because with local autonomy the people in the countryside could best determine the rules of their everyday lives.

At mid-century Mexican Liberals were most closely associated with federalism and anti-clericalism, but they also adhered to the formalities of republican, representative, constitutional democracy. They advocated freedom of the press and freedom of speech, and expanded secular educational facilities. The Liberals favored capitalist development, especially "middle-class" land ownership, and recognized a need to imbue Mexicans with the virtues of hard work and frugality. The Liberals also aimed to eliminate what they saw as impediments to capitalism, most importantly, the extensive economic holdings of the Catholic Church. Central to their program was the expropriation of Church lands and their distribution among small landholders. The Liberals were by no means in agreement among themselves on policy or method. Through the 1840s, the civil wars, and the French Intervention, Liberals were increasingly divided by a bitter internal split between the radicals (*puros*) and the moderates (*moderados*) (see the introduction).

### Post War

Mexico reached its low point politically in 1847, when, while enduring defeat by the United States, two major rebellions broke out in the countryside in the Sierra Gorda region north of the capital and in the Yucatán peninsula. Both were locally based movements of the lower classes, which threatened the Mexican *gente decente*. To make matters worse, regional bosses like Santiago Vidaurri (Nuevo León) and Manuel Lozada (Nayarit) declared themselves autonomous from the federal government. The old colonial order had passed and the new republic had shown little facility to reestablish either peace or order. Leaders from all over the ideological spectrum believed by 1853 that the nation was coming apart.

## Chapter 6

# FOREIGN INTERVENTION AND RECONSTRUCTION, 1861-67

**F**rom the time Mexico proclaimed its independence from Spain, some Mexicans advocated monarchy as the most appropriate form of government for the new nation. The ill-fated reign of Emperor Agustín I, who ruled less than a year, did not deter them. There was, for example, a brief, poorly conceived, unsuccessful monarchist plot, just before the outbreak of war with the United States in 1846. Later, Santa Anna obtained all but formal title of royalty during his last dictatorship in 1854. Despite these failures, monarchists obtained their most important opportunity in the early 1860s, when the circumstances of Mexican domestic politics and conditions in Europe came together to make the Second Empire possible. In Mexico, Conservatives, who had been defeated in civil war, looked for any means to overcome the Liberals. At the same time, the opportunistic emperor of France Napoleon III sought to enhance his international prestige by extending his sphere of influence over Mexico. He conspired with Mexican monarchists and Conservatives to install a European prince as ruler of Mexico, committing a large military force to this objective. His plan met fierce opposition from Benito Juárez, president of Mexico and the victor in the War of the Reform, who steadfastly refused to accept foreign conquest. Thus began the dramatic sagas of Maximilian and Carlota, the doomed royalty, on the one hand, and Benito Juárez, the persistent hero of Mexican sovereignty, on the other.