

Cinco de Mayo

Cinco de Mayo is an important holiday for Mexican and Mexican-American people. The holiday commemorates the May 5, 1862, battle in which the Mexican army defeated the French army. The *Batalla de Puebla* (Battle of Puebla) victory symbolized Mexican unity and patriotism. With victory over the French invaders, Mexico sent a message to the world that it would aggressively defend itself against foreign invaders.

The years leading up to the Battle of Puebla were stormy ones for Mexico. The country fought the Mexican-American War with the United States from 1846-1848. Mexico also experienced a civil war. With his country facing economic devastation because of all the conflicts, Mexican President Benito Juarez decided that the country could not afford to pay back the money it borrowed from other countries. These countries included England, Spain, and France. Juarez said that he would suspend the payments of money owed for two years to give Mexico a chance to rebuild itself. After the two-year period, Mexico would try to pay back the money it had borrowed.

England, Spain, and France didn't want to wait to get their money back. They decided to invade Mexico and take back what they could. English and Spanish forces withdrew after a while, but the French remained entrenched. Their leader, Napoleon III, wanted to build an empire in Mexico.

The French army began to advance into Mexico in 1862. At Puebla, the army encountered a group of 5,000 Mestizo and Zapotec Indians who were under the command of Mexican General Ignacio Zaragoza. Even though Zaragoza's troops were not as well equipped as the French, they defeated the French in the famous May 5 battle.

The biggest misconception about *Cinco de Mayo* is that it commemorates Mexican independence. September 16 is really Mexican Independence Day. It is the day Mexico declared its independence from Spain in 1810. It is the more important holiday in Mexico. It is known as *Diez y seis de Septiembre*. But in America, many Mexican-

