

Cinco de Mayo

-HISTORY-

Cinco de Mayo (“Fifth of May”) is an annual celebration commemorating the Mexican Army’s victory over the French Empire at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862.

Although often confused with Mexican Independence Day, Cinco de Mayo celebrates a **Mexican victory in battle that thwarted the French invasion for another year.**

Important Dates Leading up to the Battle of Puebla....

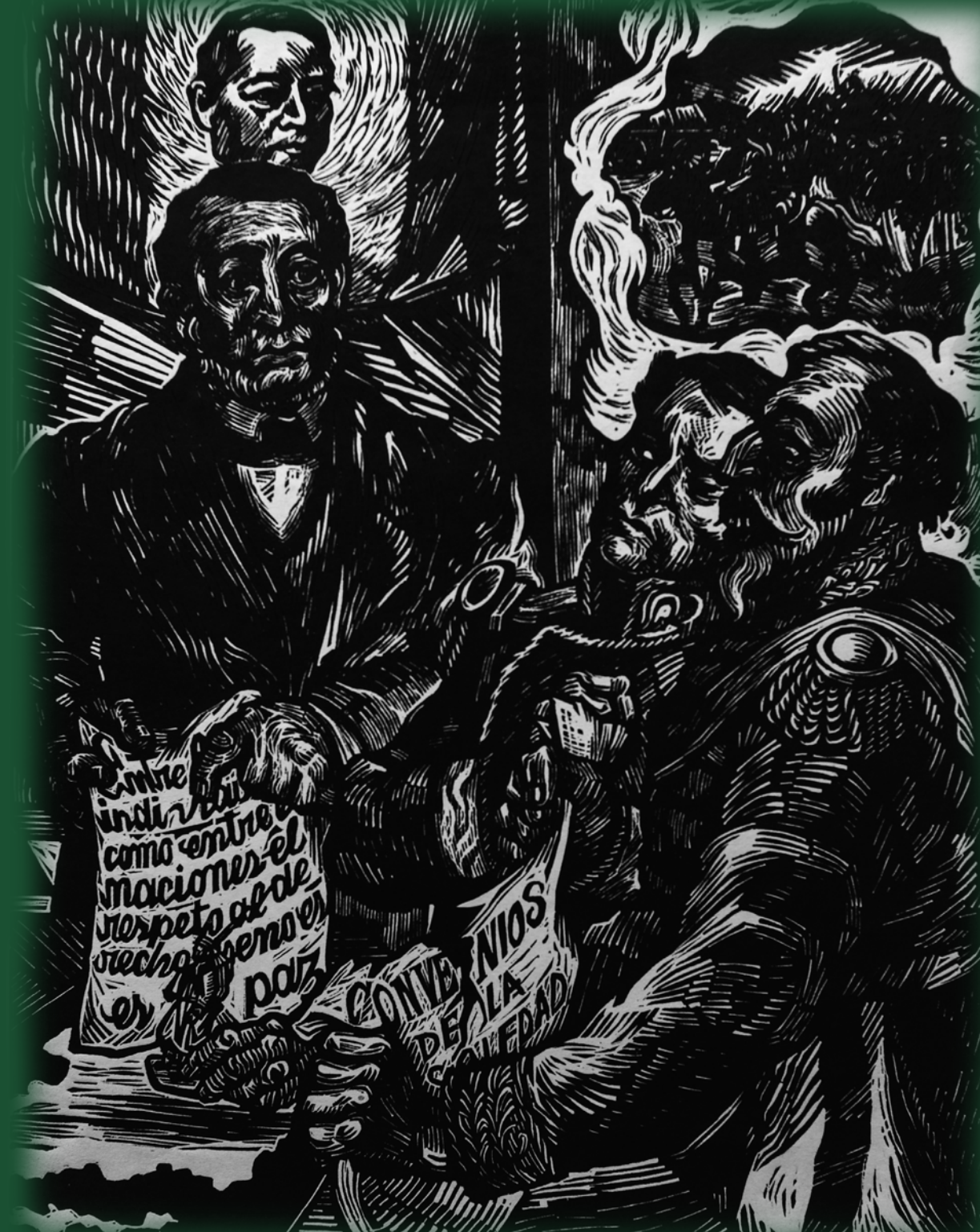


Jose Guadalupe Posada
Don Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla.
1899, Linocut Published by A. Vanego Arroyo

The Mexican-American War, also known in the United States as the Mexican War and in Mexico as the American intervention in Mexico, was an armed conflict between the United States of America and the Second Federal Republic of Mexico from 1846 to 1848. It pitted a politically divided and militarily unprepared Mexico against the expansionist-minded administration of U.S. President James K. Polk, who believed the United States had a “manifest destiny” to spread across the continent to the Pacific Ocean. Mexico was forced to sell 54% of its land holdings to the United States for \$15 million. Gold was discovered in California just three days before Mexico ceded the territory.



Angel Bracho
Estandarte Constitucionalista. Linocut
Mexic-Arte Museum Permanent Collection



Angel Bracho
Convenios de la Soledad Linocut
Mexic-Arte Museum Permanent Collection

1810-1821

La Guerra de la Independencia (Mexican War of Independence). Independence Day (September 16) celebrates the day Miguel Hidalgo made the cry of independence (*El Grito de la Independencia*) in the town of Dolores, Guanajuato to motivate people to revolt against the Spanish regime. Mexico’s independence was not actually obtained until September 28, 1821.

1846-1848



Angel Bracho
Compravento de Naciones. Linocut
Mexic-Arte Museum Permanent Collection

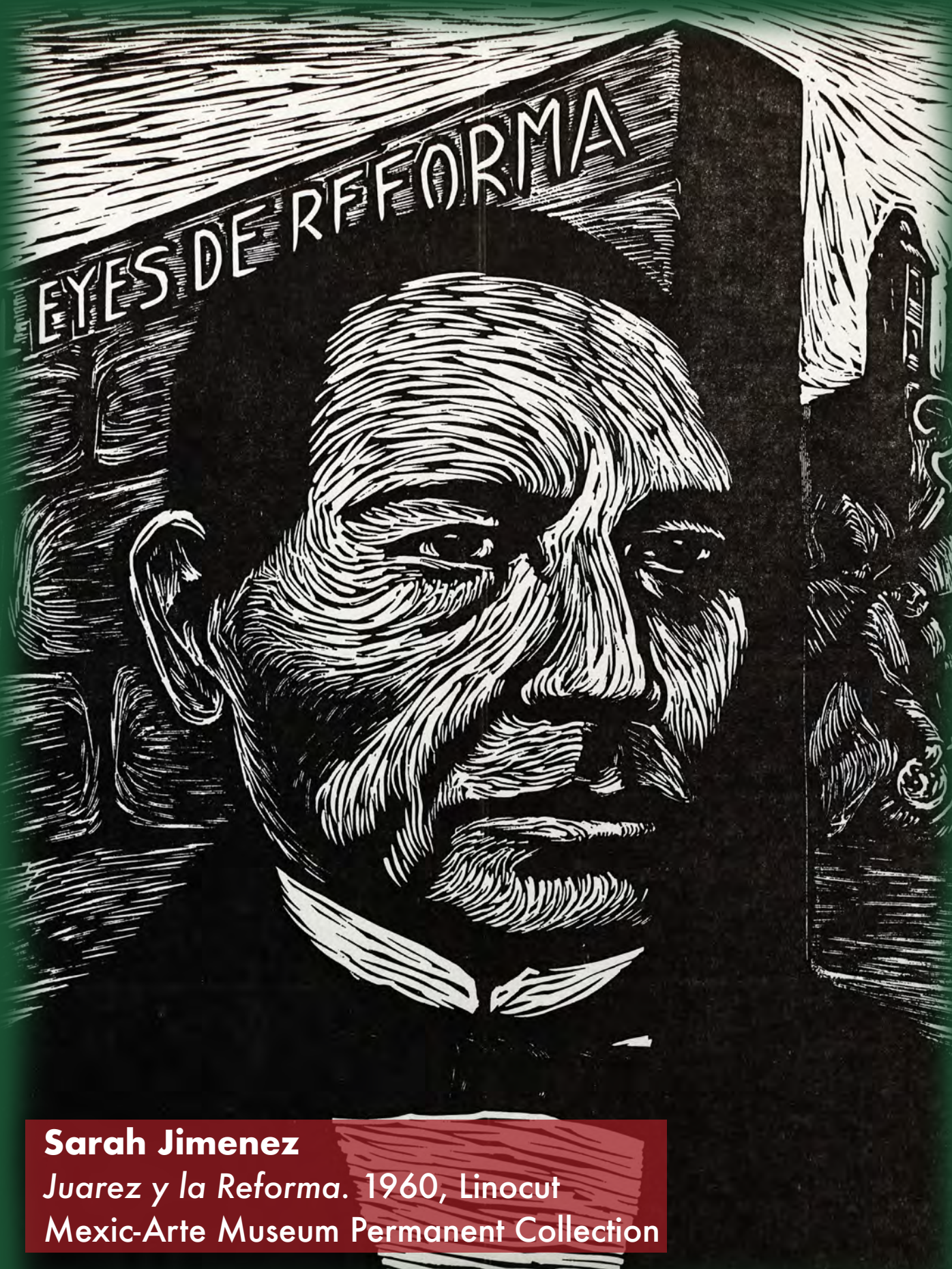
1857-1860

The War of Reform in Mexico, during the Second Federal Republic of Mexico, was the three-year civil war between members of the Liberal Party attempting to implement democracy, and members of the Conservative Party resisting the legitimacy of that government and its radical restructuring of Mexican laws, known as “La Reforma.” The Conservatives controlled the capital and much of central Mexico, while the rest of the states had to choose whether to side with the Conservative government or the Liberal government of Benito Juárez and Mexican Army General Ignacio Zaragoza. While the Conservative forces lost the war, guerrillas remained active in the countryside for years after, and Conservatives in Mexico would conspire with French forces to install Maximilian I as emperor during the following French Intervention in Mexico. At the end of this war Mexico’s army and economy was left depleted. The fleeing Conservative officials had not only emptied the treasury; but had seized foreigners’ property, and taken out loans with foreign banks in Spain, England, and France.

1861

Mexico’s post war “debt” offered the perfect excuse for invasion. Taking advantage of the relative weakness of the United States during the US Civil War, in December of 1861 the governments of France, Great Britain, and Spain landed an allied military force at the port of Veracruz after the Convention of London. Benito Juárez negotiated with the allies and promised to resume payments, and the British and Spanish troops began to withdraw from Mexico. Napoleon III, however, had decided to conquer Mexico for France and re-establish an Empire in the west while simultaneously stopping American westward expansion in the process. Among the motivations of the French was to weaken the United States by supporting the Confederacy with their first class army after gaining a foothold in Mexico. In a letter to his superiors French Army General Lorencez boasted that, “The French soldiers enjoy such racial and organizational superiority over the Mexicans that with my 6,000 men, I will control all of Mexico.”

IMPORTANT FIGURES



Sarah Jimenez
Juarez y la Reforma. 1960, Linocut
Mexic-Arte Museum Permanent Collection

BENITO PABLO JUAREZ GARCIA

(March 21, 1806 – July 18, 1872)



Angel Bracho
General Ignacio Zaragoza. 1960, Linocut
Mexic-Arte Museum Permanent Collection

IGNACIO ZARAGOZA

(March 25, 1829 - September 8 1862)

Benito Pablo Juárez García (March 21, 1806 – July 18, 1872) was a Mexican lawyer and president of Mexico, of Zapotec origin from Oaxaca. He was of poor, rural, indigenous origin, but he became a well-educated, urban professional and politician, who married a woman of Oaxaca City, Margarita Maza. He identified primarily as a Liberal and wrote only briefly about his indigenous heritage.

Juárez’s political rise was a continual struggle to transform his liberal ideas of economic capitalism and separation of church and state, into a permanent political reality and to overcome the prevalent social attitudes toward his Indian background. His domestic Laws of Reform set the stage for Mexico’s remarkable modernization in the last quarter of the 19th century and freed Mexico from the most-flagrant remnants of neocolonialism. His leadership against the French earned Juárez his place as a national hero.

Ignacio Zaragoza (March 25, 1829 - September 8, 1862) has a special place in Mexico and Texas history. Usually favoring spectacles and a black civilian suit, Brig. Gen. Ignacio Zaragoza looked more like a young professor than a Mexican general. He had been born into the army, though not into one of the *criollo* (Mexico-born Spanish) military families, rather his father had been a sergeant in the garrison at Presidio La Bahía del Espíritu Santo; his mother was a San Antonio native. He not only originated in Goliad, Texas when Texas was Mexico, and claimed relations with Tejanos from the colonial period, but he began his military career in the Monterrey-Saltito area and married a young woman from Monterrey. He was truly Mexican by choice.

Five years after the Mexican-American War, Zaragoza decided that he had a military calling. During the War of the Reform, he was promoted for his part in the Liberals’ victories and by 1860, when the Conservative forces were decisively defeated and the three-year war formally ended, **Zaragoza** had defeated in battle every leading Conservative general. In 1861, Juárez named him Secretary of War and Navy. In preparation for the famous battle of Puebla, Gen. Zaragoza recruited around 500 Tejano cowboys from the Jim Wells County area of South Texas who served as cavalrymen in the fight against French intervention even in the months and years following that actual battle. Texas cemented his memory as an iconic transborder and transnational hero against foreign aggression by establishing the General Zaragoza State Historic Site near Goliad, Texas.

Soon after the Battle of Puebla and before the French had advanced on Mexico City, President Juárez hosted a celebration of **Zaragoza** as a national hero. The president also declared May 5, 1862, a national holiday and changed the name of Puebla de Los Angeles to Puebla de **Zaragoza**. Shortly after his famous victory, **Zaragoza** was struck with typhoid fever, of which he died at the age of 33. He was buried in San Fernando Cemetery in Mexico City. He was later exhumed and transferred to Puebla, while his former tomb became a monument.



The Zaragoza Birthplace State Historic Park is located adjacent to Presidio La Bahía in Goliad State Park and Historic Site, Goliad County in the U.S. state of Texas.

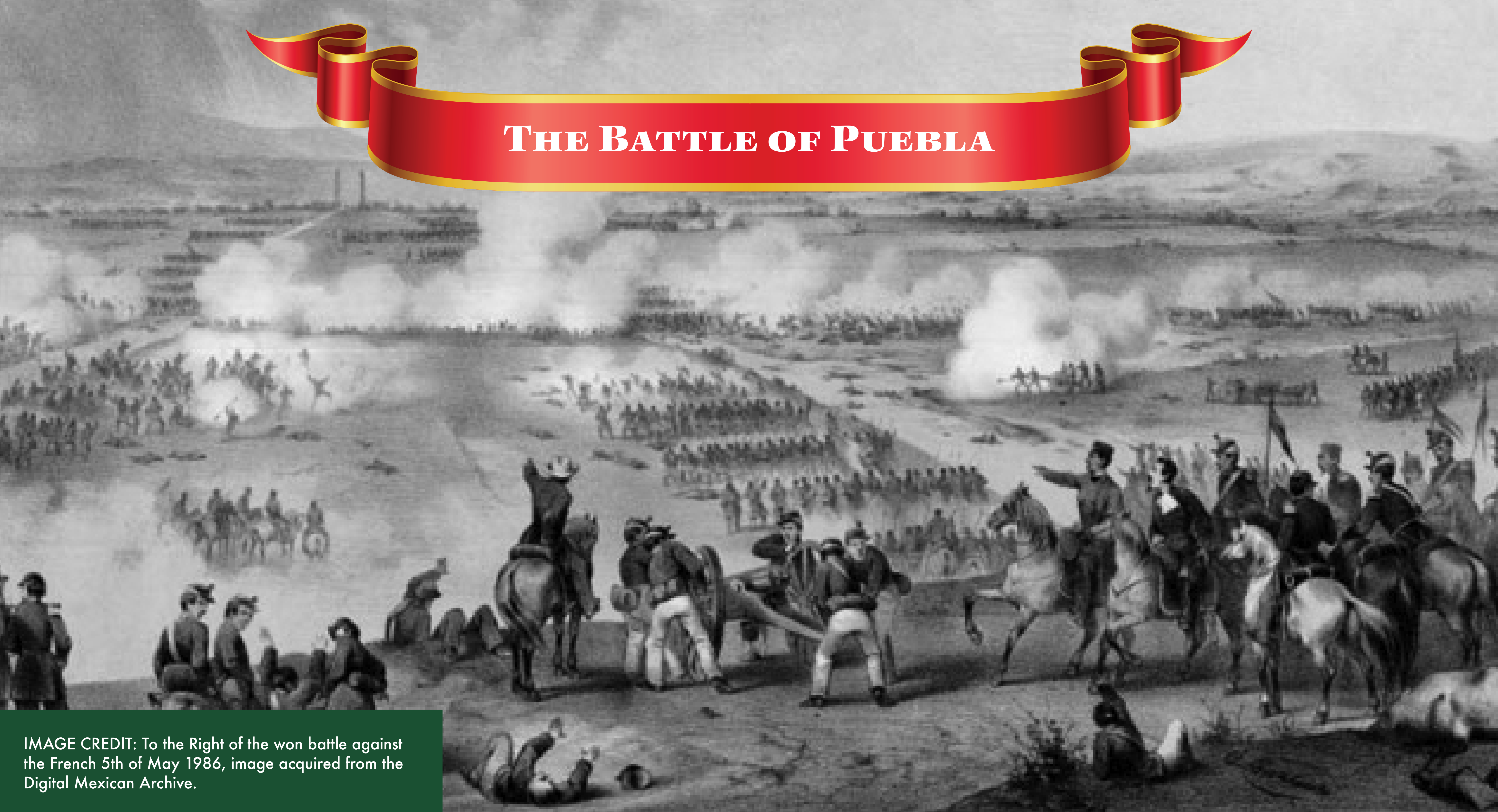


IMAGE CREDIT: To the Right of the won battle against the French 5th of May 1866, image acquired from the Digital Mexican Archive.

France’s intervention in Mexico was the first phase in **Louis Napoleon’s** “Grand Design,” a scheme that had been conceived during **Louis’s** long exile in England and the United States. **Napoleon III’s** design envisioned Paris as the political hub (with Rome the religious hub) of a cultural, commercial, and religious empire uniting all the Catholic nations of Europe. Latin America, a term **Napoleon III** coined, was a critical part of his so-called Latin League. With a new canal in Mexico or Central America to complement the Suez Canal already being built with French investment, the League would dominate world trade.

In 1862, over 6000 French troops landed at Veracruz intending to reach the capital of Mexico City. The French advance was along a route that had been used several times in the past to conquer Mexico, first by the Spanish conquistador **Hernan Cortes** and most recently by U.S. General Winfield Scott during the Mexican-American War. On May 5th 1862, near the city of Puebla, the outnumbered Mexican Army held their ground defending two forts (Guadalupe and Loreto), resulting in over 500 French deaths and a retreat. The Mexican victory at Puebla against a much better equipped and larger french army provided a significant morale boost to the Mexican Army and also helped slow the French Army’s advance to Mexico City, so newspapers throughout the country ran headlines intending to spread the message of national unity and hope. This battle was also one of the first to be telegraphed not only domestically in “real time” but even going so far as the United States. **Zaragoza’s** success at the Battle of Puebla on May 5th represented a great symbolic victory for the Mexican government and bolstered the resistance movement. An important significance of the Battle of Puebla is that up until this point in history there had been no official National Mexican Army. During the War of Reform the confederate army was drafted or pardoned for prison time or debt to fight in the war. The army that defeated the French at Puebla was made up of volunteer brigades from different Mexican states. There was also the indigenous peoples of the northern sierra highlands of Zacapoaxtla, Tetela, Xochiapulco, and other Nahuas. It was the first time the country came together as an independent nation fighting for sovereignty. Most of them were recently recruited and untried in battle. Before battle Gen. **Zaragoza** told them simply: “Our enemies may be the world’s best soldiers, but you are the best sons of Mexico, and they want to seize our country from you. Today, you are going to fight for a sacred objective; you are going to fight for the motherland and I promise that this day we shall triumph in a day of eternal renown. I see victory in your faces. Let us have faith! *“¡Viva la independencia nacional! ¡Viva México!”* The soldiers enthusiastically echoed the call.

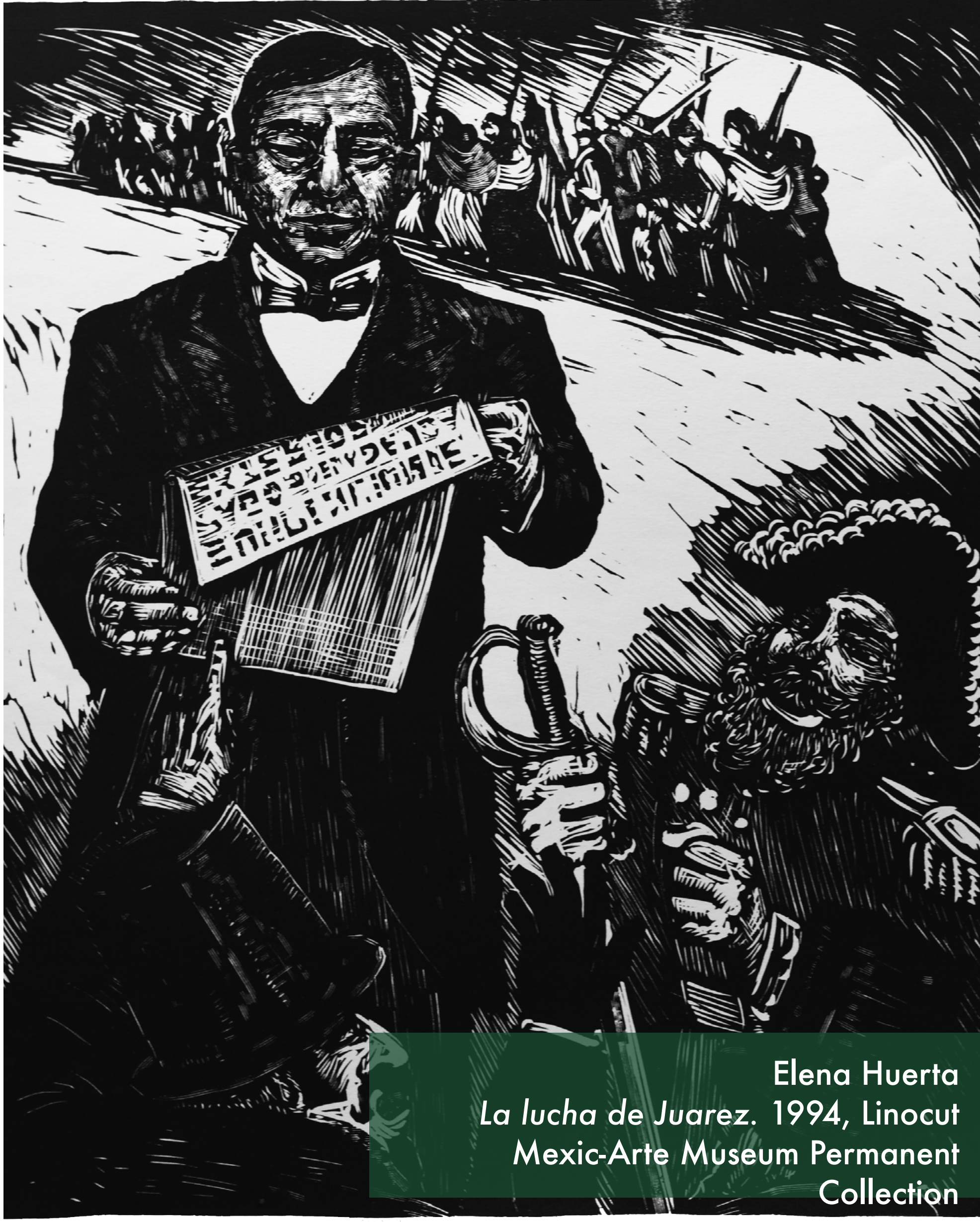


Emperor Maximilian’s Royal Carriage. On display at Castillo Chapultepec Castle, Mexico City.

Alberto Beltran
El pueblo responde. Linocut
Mexic-Arte Museum Permanent Collection

The following year the French returned with a much larger army of 40,000; under a new commander, took Puebla in a three-month siege, and marched unopposed into Mexico City to seat Maximilian on his long-anticipated throne. **Zaragoza** did not live to see it, having died of typhoid four months after the Battle of Puebla.

Maximilian and his wife **Charlotte** arrived in Mexico, believing that they had the support of the Mexican people, but nationalism in Mexico was running high. **Maximilian** was too liberal for the conservative Mexicans who supported the monarchy, and lost the support of the *papal nuncio* (the envoy representing the Pope) when he declared freedom of religion. In the summer of 1867, after heavy American diplomatic and military pressure, **Napoleon III** brought his last troops home, consigning **Maximilian** to a Mexican firing squad and his own Grand Design for the Americas to the trashcan of history.



Elena Huerta
La lucha de Juarez. 1994, Linocut
Mexic-Arte Museum Permanent Collection

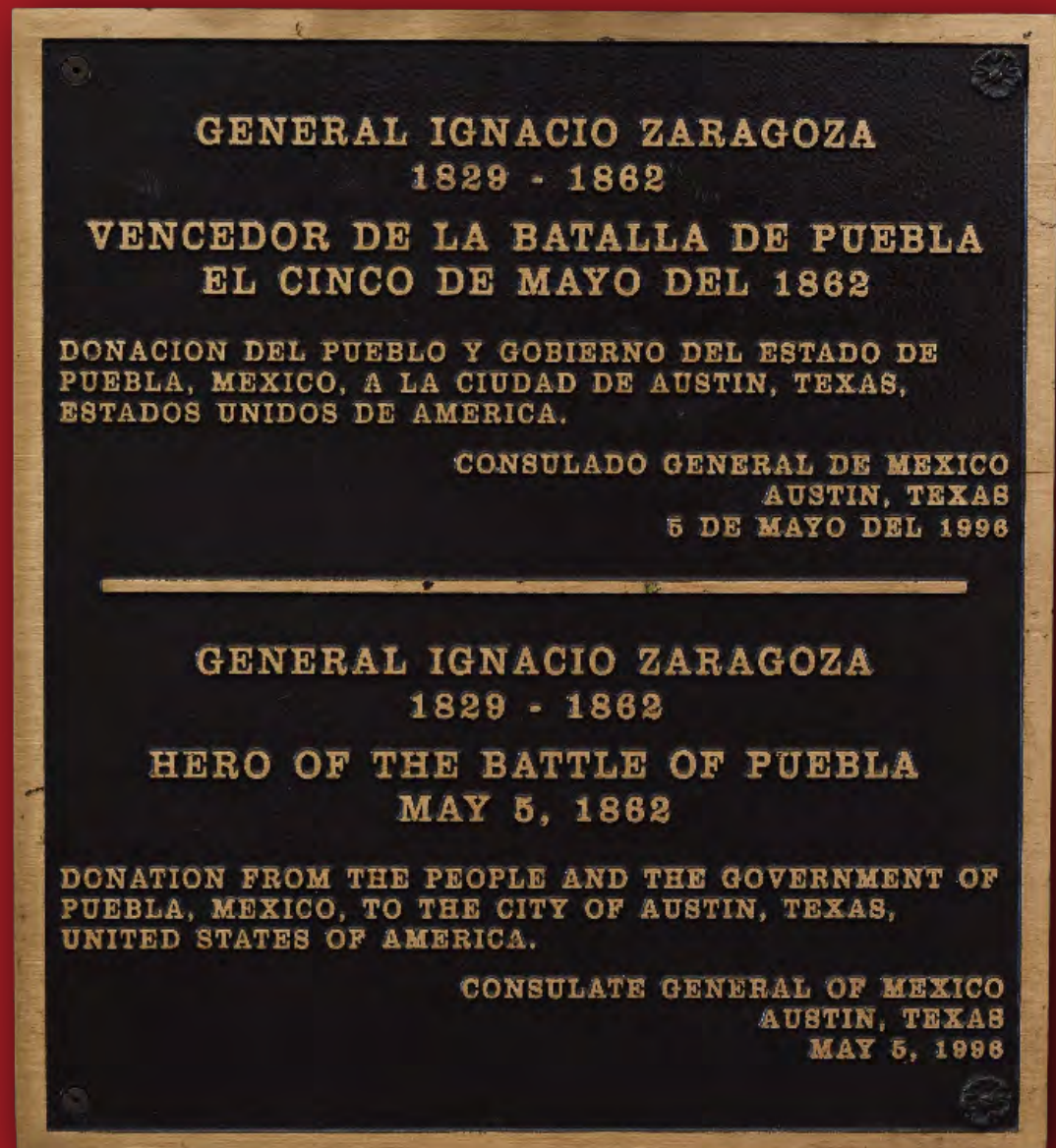


S.M. Maximiliano



S.M. Carlota

The Significance



Within Mexico, **Cinco de Mayo** is primarily observed in the state of Puebla, where **Zaragoza’s** unlikely victory occurred, although other parts of the country also take part in the celebration. Traditions include military parades, recreations of the Battle of Puebla and other festive events.

In the United States, **Cinco de Mayo** is widely interpreted as a celebration of Mexican culture and heritage, particularly in areas with substantial Mexican - American populations. Chicano activists raised awareness of the holiday in the 1960s, in part because they identified with the victory of indigenous Mexicans (such as Juárez) over European invaders during the Battle of Puebla. Today, revelers mark the occasion with parades, parties, mariachi music, Mexican folk dancing and traditional foods such as tacos and mole poblano. Some of the largest festivals are held in Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston and Austin, Texas for Mexic-Arte Museum’s: Taste of Mexico.

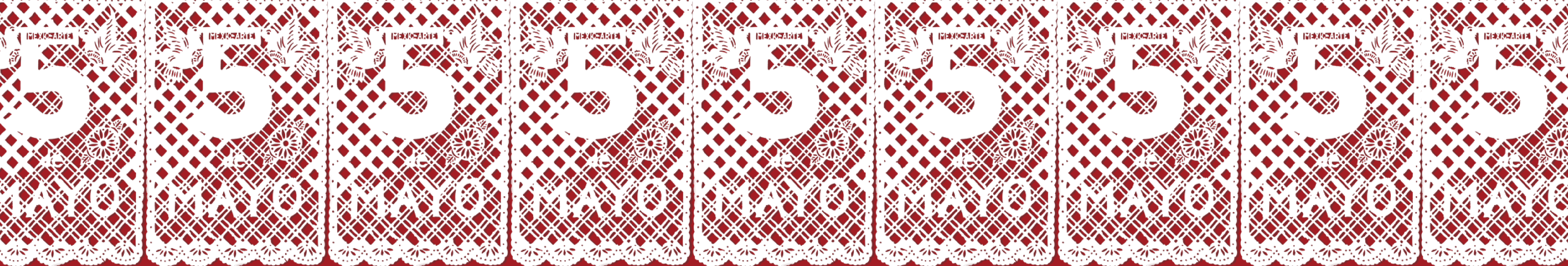


Jose Guadalupe Posada
Biblioteca del niño Mexicano: El cinco de mayo In 1900, the Maucci Brothers, a Spanish publisher, released a series of educational booklets devoted to the dissemination of episodes of national history. The Mexican journalist and novelist Heriberto Frías (1870-1925) wrote the stories, Jose Guadalupe Posada produced the cover illustrations as mechanically produced chromolithographs.



Marcel Desbois
Monumento a la Paz y Reconciliación Franco-Mexicano. 1896, bronze statue on French Pantheon (Architect, Auguste Leroy) French Cemetery Puebla City, Puebla

In 1896, under a petition started by the French Society of Remembrance, the bodies of all French and Mexican soldiers who fought in the Battle of Puebla and later during the French Intervention were relocated and buried with honors at the French Cemetery in Puebla City. At the top of the mausoleum is a bronze sculpture by a French master, which depicts the Angel of Peace; flanked by a French soldier and Mexican General Porfirio Diaz, who shake hands. The Angel of Peace raises the olive branch of peace above Diaz. This gift from the French was a symbolic restoration of the bonds of friendship between countries as well as a symbol of healing for the Republic of Mexico



Fidencio Duran
Comite Patriota. 1996, Acrylic on board City of Austin Art in Public Places Collection Zaragoza Park and Recreation Center Austin, TX.

Puebla City donated a bust and monumental plaque to **Zaragoza** Park and recreational center in Austin, TX. The park was established in 1931 to be a community and social center for Mexican and Mexican - American people to come together and celebrate *“las fiestas patrias.”* In 1996 Austin artist **Fidencio Duran** was commissioned to paint murals inside the rec center depicting Hispanic culture both in Mexico and Texas. Duran chose to focus on patriotic Mexican heroes and **Ignacio Zaragoza**, whom the park is named for is a central image.



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