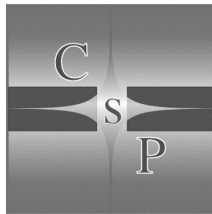


Children of the Sun

Children of the Sun:
An Ethnographic Study
of the Street Children
of Latin America

By

Jerry Hollingsworth



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book is dedicated to Beth, my wife and my best friend.

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PREFACE

Sociologists have used ethnographic studies on a regular basis to obtain data about subjects that need greater understanding, and there have been several scholars who were instrumental in influencing my own work in this area. As an undergraduate in sociology, I first became fascinated with the works of Erving Goffman, and his early writings gave rise to my original desire to complete work in ethnographic methods and field studies. Later, I became familiar with the work of Sociologist Dr. Terry Williams, who spent two years observing a teenage cocaine drug ring on the streets of New York City. He published the results in a monograph called *The Cocaine Kids: The inside story of a teenage drug ring*. This book gave a detailed description of a social phenomenon that would never have been able to be quantified with surveys or other forms of research. The ethnographic study by Williams also influenced me to begin investigating inhalant abuse and other drug problems of the children in Latin America. Another major influence has been Elijah Anderson, a distinguished professor of Sociology from the University of Pennsylvania who has studied street life and juvenile delinquency on the streets of Philadelphia. After reading Anderson's work, the *Code of the Streets*, I was convinced that the streets kids of Mexico and Peru could best be studied under a similar qualitative approach. However, it was the controversial anthropologist, Oscar Lewis, who published *The Children of Sanchez*, and *Five Families*, (both works that described poverty inside Mexico), that largely inspired this ethnographic study. Although Lewis received some criticism over the literary format in which he presented his information, his work described the everyday life of typical poverty-stricken Mexican families. Lewis' work on the "culture of poverty" has also been debated in many academic circles, but it was his rich and graphic presentation of the family lives of poor Mexican families that drew me to complete this work.

Comparison with Peru

In completing part I of this project, I wanted to compare the results of my work in Mexico with another culture in South America, so I chose Peru. Both countries have similar histories, in that they were both

conquered by Spain, and enslaved and exploited for a long period of time in their development. So, I wanted to see how the two cultures differed in the area of child poverty.

Preparation for Field Work

There were a number of obstacles I faced in preparing for this study. One, of course, was the language barrier. Although I had already spent several years studying Spanish, first in high school, and again as an undergraduate, I felt my use of the language was still too weak to successfully begin a major research project in the heart of Mexico and Peru. It took a great deal of work to bolster my language skills to the point in which I was able to function in both countries. At first, I immersed myself in basic texts, reviewing vocabulary words, conjugating verbs, translating sentences, and studying Spanish dictionaries. I also spent as much time as possible watching Spanish movies, television programs, Spanish soap operas, and commercials, trying to get a better feel for hearing the spoken language. I read bilingual magazines when they were available, and talked with colleagues in the Spanish department at the university in which I worked. All of these preparations enabled me to converse with the residents and officials of Mexico and Peru, including the children I studied during this project.

Intensive Cultural and Language Studies

During the second summer in which much of this research work was undertaken, (2005) I enrolled at the Universidad Internacional, at the Center for Bilingual and Multicultural Studies in Cuernavaca, Mexico, for an intensive language and cultural program. I would spend 6 hours each day, Monday through Friday, studying the culture and language of Mexico. I lived with a Mexican family, and was completely immersed in the culture of Mexico in order to increase my fluency of the language for this project. I felt that the language studies would help me function in Peru, as well. This was my headquarters during the time I was studying the street children of Mexico. During the evenings, early morning hours, and weekends, I would set out and complete my observations of the street kids of Cuernavaca and study Spanish during the day. The Universidad Internacional was very helpful in getting me out to an orphanage, *Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos*, (Our Little Brothers and Sisters) in Cuernavaca to visit the homeless children that were housed there. This is a very unique facility that contains over 1,000 homeless children from all over Latin

America. Each child there has a unique and sad social history of their lives as homeless street children. I was able to conduct observations and interviews with some of the children that were housed there.

Working in Peru

In Peru, I was able to secure a volunteer assignment in the Bruce Peru organization, an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization), working with children in the schools in the Shanty towns of Lima. It was an opportunity to get to know the children of those areas, and to interview and observe them on a regular basis. From that job as a volunteer, I would be able to observe many things, such as the effect of the lack of play in their social development, socialization patterns and other important factors.

Personal Safety

One of the greatest pitfalls of this investigation was one of personal safety. Some of the neighborhoods I visited in Mexico were crime-ridden areas where a person of white skin (*Gringos*) was very noticeable, and in some cases, very unwanted, as well. In some neighborhoods, being white was an invitation for unwanted strangers to approach, ask questions, beg for money, or otherwise size me up as a potential victim.

On several occasions, in Mexico, I had to fend off offers from adult street hustlers that subsequently attempted to lure me into engaging in activities with prostitutes or other pornographic schemes for a price. These men made their living hustling everything from women and prostitution to selling drugs on street corners. The high crime rate in Mexico is certainly something to take seriously.

In Peru, while working in the two worst Barrios in Lima, we were instructed to leave the areas before noon if possible. Apparently, the drunks, the gangs, and the unlawful element usually slept until noon. Usually, we were able to get out of the barrios before that happened, but on a few occasions, we were accosted by some questionable characters begging for money, or otherwise sizing us up. We rarely wore good clothes or jewelry in these areas, or took excessive amounts of money with us. After I finished my research in Lima, I moved on to the rural areas of Peru, including a village called Limitamba, where the population was almost 100 percent indigenous to get an idea of what rural peasant life was like. Then, I proceeded to Cusco, the center of what used to be the mighty Inca Empire. While there, I took a room in a hostel and began to investigate the street children of Cusco. At this point, I conducted my

studies from the center of Cusco, at the Plaza de Armas. At night, Cusco could become crime-ridden as well, and pickpockets and muggers were present. Fortunately, I was never accosted or threatened in Cusco.

It is my hope that this research will be able to answer several questions about the subcultures of street children, and will give an idea of what life is like for children who live in poverty in Latin America. Although this research was limited to Mexico and Peru, there are many other poor areas in the Latin American world that also deserve to be studied. For example, while interviewing children in the orphanage, I was appalled to learn that there had been reports of shootings of homeless children in Guatemala, by “death Squads,” and the rumors were that the death squads were off duty police officers. Other parts of Latin America are subsequently experiencing rising numbers of orphans and street children of all varieties. In La Paz, Bolivia, for example, I had heard of a group of children who had taken jobs as shoeshine boys, and wore masks so that people could not identify them. I was actually on my way to see this population of children to get interviews, but after purchasing a bus ticket to La Paz, I came down with an acute case of altitude sickness in Cusco, and had to return home.

INTRODUCTION

POVERTY AND THE PRESUMPTION OF CHILDHOOD

Defining Child Poverty

Child poverty can be defined in a number of different ways, using a variety of models. UNICEF, (2006) the United Nations organization that specializes in dealing with childhood poverty all over the world defines child poverty as such:

“Children living in poverty are those who experience deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society.”

There are other definitions in the literature, as well. For example, the Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Center (CHIP) define poverty in this manner:

“Childhood poverty means children and young people growing up without access to different types of resources that are vital for their wellbeing and for them to fulfill their potential. By resources, we mean economic, social, cultural, physical, environmental and political resources.”

By applying these two definitions to childhood poverty, it would appear that there are millions of children who miss out on their childhood as a result of poverty. Does this poverty deprive them of the capabilities needed to survive, develop and thrive? Does it prevent them from enjoying equal opportunities?

Most developmental experts would agree that a child should have a life marked by childhood play, which would include recreational aspects, games, and other activities associated with being a kid. Such play, according to developmental experts helps children develop into fully functioning adults. Is there a fundamental right where a child is presumed to be able to play? Is play an essential ingredient to the socialization

process? Does every child need this notion of “play” in their life in order to grow and develop properly?

A Presumption of Childhood

In North America, there exists a preconceived notion that I call the “presumption of childhood.” That is, we hold the concept of childhood sacred, and we believe that childhood itself is a designated period of social and intellectual development where children can relax and play and partake in games. Childhood in industrial societies lasts roughly through the first twelve years of life. It is also a period characterized by freedom from responsibilities. However, some historians suggest that in medieval Europe, childhood as we know it did not exist (Aries 2003). Such research is used to suggest that childhood is far from just being an issue of biological maturation. In fact, the existence of a predetermined childhood that contains fun and games may not be an automatic activity for children of some cultures today. In cultures where poverty exists, for example, play may not be guaranteed at all. For children who live in poverty the first 12 years of life may be a period marked by work or other adult activity. A plethora of factors in another culture may influence whether the children are allowed a time period for play or other such activities.

The Latin American Stage

The situation in Latin America is a case in point. The statistics from UNICEF (2006), show that 3.5 million children aged between 12 and 17 are part of the formal or informal labor force in Mexico. Other countries, of course, have similar problems throughout Latin America. Extreme poverty in many areas of Latin America has trapped children into lives that require them to survive in the streets, or work the streets to earn a living for their families, or to support themselves because they are homeless. For example, in Peru, of the 3.8 million people who live in poverty, 2.1 million of those are children. Many of these children have never experienced the sanctity of childhood. Millions of children are busy working the streets to help support their families. Millions of children are homeless, and live in the streets, parks, abandoned buildings or sewers throughout Latin America. Play is not a concern, but survival is. Children learn to steal to survive, or to beg from strangers instead of playing games. Living in the streets also makes children more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, violence, discrimination and stigmatization. Is childhood necessarily guaranteed by society, then? Is there really a presumption of childhood?

Do societies automatically guarantee this concept we have come to acknowledge as childhood? If so, what happens to children that do not have this guarantee? Will they develop the proper cognitive functions that children in industrialized nations develop? What are the long term consequences, if any? This study will set out to answer these questions, and will shed light on the lifestyles of children who live in poverty in Latin America.

America's Past History

It is interesting to note, that in the United States of America, we have not always guaranteed childhood, either. Child labor laws were not clearly established in the U.S. until the 1930's, with the help of Lewis Hines and the child labor movement that called for regulations and laws against the exploitation of American children (Mofford 1997). For decades, in the U.S., children have worked to support their families, slaving away in coal mines, factories, or other labor intensive endeavors, often for 12 hours a day, and for very little pay.

Little Hustlers in America

From the 1850's through the First World War, America's streets were filled with "little hustlers," or street children who sold everything from newspapers to candy. Some children shined shoes to survive. Most of these children were orphaned or abandoned to survive on their own. This account is also documented in the Disney movie, *Newsies*. America not only looked the other way during these times, but according to most reports, even condoned and respected these enterprising young people. These same children who came to be known as "little hustlers" often slept in alleyways, or abandoned buildings. Until the 1920's, several American Newspapers actually depended largely on these children to sell their products on the streets. Boys and girls peddled newspapers on the streets night and day, even in inclement weather. Some of these "newsies" slept on the sidewalks outside, waiting to pick up the morning editions.

Children also worked in sweatshops in New York City's garment district, working long hours and getting paid very little to sew clothes. According to the U.S. Census in 1880, 1,118,000 children (all under the age of 16) were a regular part of the American workforce. Compare this figure to the 1996 statistics provided by UNICEF, where 3.5 million children in Mexico under the age of 17 are still part of their overall labor force. Lewis Hine called attention to this problem in America when he

began photographing these working children for the National Child Labor Committee in the early 1900's. His investigative work revealed that there were working children all over America being exploited by American companies. In fact, many of these children lived in poverty, never went to school, and had no real home. In New York City, alone, thousands of homeless working children lived in shelters run by the Children's Aid Society. Interestingly enough, most Americans respected these children as enterprising youngsters who were doing everything to help their families, or to support themselves (Freedman, 1994).

According to some scholars, the discovery of childhood is only a recent phenomenon in history. At the end of the middle Ages, children were regarded as small adults who mingled, competed, worked, and played with mature adults. Only gradually did parents begin to encourage the separation of adults and children and developed a new family attitude about children in general.

A Shift in Priorities

In another sense, child labor has always been closely associated with poverty (Hindman 2002). It seems, however, that most economically advanced nations have gone on to solve their child labor problems. Not so in parts of Latin America. In that regard, however, it may be useful to know that Latin American street children who live in poverty may not be that much different from other countries that have gone through similar situations in their history. And even so, even wealthy nations have not completely eradicated poverty from their own midst, or the problem of child labor.

The Importance of Play

An extensive amount of time that youth generally spend with peers in early childhood involves play, and it continues to be a common activity among children in most industrialized countries. Several key figures have written about the importance and functions of play among children. For example, Erik Erickson (1950), believed that play permitted the child to work off past emotions and to find imaginary relief for past frustrations. Because these tensions are relieved in play, the child or adult is better able to cope with problems in life and to work efficiently. Thus, psychoanalytic theorists believe play permits an individual to let off excess physical energy, and to release pent-up tensions.

Jean Piaget (1962), a prominent theorist who studied cognitive development in children viewed play as a medium to help children advance their ability to learn to think properly. Play, according to Piaget allows children to practice their competencies and acquire skills in a relaxed, pleasurable way.

Other developmental experts also have agreed that play is a way for the child to safely explore and seek out new information. Play is exciting and pleasurable in itself because it satisfies the exploratory drive of individuals (Berlyne, 1960).

Other researchers have observed children at play and categorized the different methods in which children carry on the function of play.

Different Types of Play

Perhaps the most elaborate attempt to examine developmental changes in children's social play was conducted many years ago by Mildred Parten. Based on observations of children in free play at nursery school, she developed several different categories of play. According to Parten, there is unoccupied play, solitary play, onlooker play, parallel play, associative play, as well as cooperative play. Each of these forms of play satisfies a different developmental focus for children, and contributes to their overall development of social skills (Parten 1932).

Functions of Play

According to these developmental experts, play is an important and vital part of a child's life. It is thought to increase interaction and cooperation with other children, allowing them to practice social roles they will follow later in life. Play may also allow a release of anxiety and tension, as well as advancing cognitive development in children.

The Emphasis on Latin America

This study delves into the lives of children who live in poverty in Latin America and reveals the plight of children in two cultures, Mexico and Peru. Both of these countries have often ignored or disregarded the problem of street children in a number of different ways. So, it becomes clear that not all societies have subscribed to this presumption of childhood, and even our own history of condoning this treatment in the years previous to World War II indicates that children have not always been guaranteed this automatic privilege of a "sanctity of childhood."

So, what happens to the children who have no guarantee of this presumption of childhood? What are their lives like? Are they able to thrive according to the definitions that UNICEF and other agencies lay down in their reports? Are the children that live in shanty towns throughout Latin America able to fully develop cognitively and socially as developmental psychologists say children should? Is play necessary for their survival?

An Ethnographic Field Study in Latin America

This research project is an ethnographic study that was designed to gain more information about the subculture of children who live in poverty in Latin America. It was conducted in their natural setting: the streets, and in their schools, their homes, and in abandoned buildings, parks, sewers, and other places where children survive the horrors of poverty and homelessness. I conducted in-depth interviews with the street children, gathered social histories, analyzed historical data, and completed close, personal observations in an attempt to gain further information about this unique subculture. In an ethnographic research project such as this one, my intent was to get to know the subjects and situations well and gradually build up, or induce, descriptions and explanations of what is really going on in the lives of the children and of this cultural phenomenon that has spread through Latin America.

The Subculture of Street Kids

In this work, I have documented qualitatively, what the lives of some of these children are like, and how they are living. Most of these children have had no childhood. What they do have is a life that exists on the streets. They have built a subculture, or another way of life in order to survive the harsh life they are enduring. This project will describe these subcultures, and will attempt to shed light on the day-to-day existence of kids who have had no childhood.

What is a subculture?

A subculture is defined by Sociologists as a “category of people who share distinguishing attributes, beliefs, values, and/or norms that set them apart in some significant manner from the dominant culture (Kendall 2006).” The subculture of the Street Children is made up of two distinct groups of

children, as defined by UNICEF: market children and homeless street children. These two groups are referred to many times by UNICEF beginning in 1986. However, in association with my research, I identified another category worthy of study, and that is what I have labeled “street family children.” One of the primary objectives of this qualitative study was to identify several informants from each category of street children that have been identified in Mexico and in Peru. Of these samples, I have provided a description of several key elements in the development of these street children, their socialization patterns, family status, social stratification, and criminal activity, including drug use, or other petty crimes committed. Of course, I examined their use of play in their lives, or the lack thereof.

The Use of Inhalants and Drugs

Another primary purpose of this study was to get a closer look at the level of inhalant use and drug use among the street children in Mexico and Peru. The extraordinary number of homeless young people currently in Latin America and the fact that well over half of them are inhalant addicts lessens the possibility that they will ever leave the streets. Because glue is widely used in the large shoemaking industry, and safety standards for adhesives are non-existent in Latin America, inexpensive industrial adhesives are readily available throughout the region which makes the substance easy to get. There are no controls over the distribution of these substances, either. While other narcotic substances, such as cocaine and heroin, are restricted and sales are criminalized, selling and buying shoe glue is legal.

In Peru, of course, coca leaves are abundant, and the use of these products has become a large part of the everyday life of the street children who live in the streets in Peru. This study will also examine the use of *cocanel*, or *coca paste (basuco)* among street children in Peru.

History, Politics, Economics and Religion

Unique factors have created this subculture of the street kids. The exodus from rural areas to cities has torn at the fabric of traditional rural families and created a high proportion of homeless children. This study will briefly explore those economic and historical reasons, as well. I felt it was necessary to gain as much information as possible in order to understand more about the situation in Mexico and Peru. So, I spent a great deal of time studying the complete history of Mexico and Peru,

including the archaeology of earlier pre-Colombian civilizations, the politics of both countries, the economics, religion, philosophy, music, literature, and the art of the Mexican people and the Peruvians. I felt that it was important to look at these aspects of a culture in order to get the full picture of the lives of the people who live in these circumstances. Such readiness, in my mind, eases the cultural barriers and ethnocentrism that may otherwise occur when studying different cultures from our own. All of these major areas of study have given me a greater awareness of the problem in Mexico known as the “children of the street,” or *Ninos De La Calle*, and similar problems in Peru.

PART I:
HOMELESS CHILDREN OF MEXICO

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Street Children: A Major Problem

The United Nations (2006), has estimated the population of street children worldwide at 150 million, with the number rising daily, especially in Latin America, where the statistics show that approximately 40 million street children are currently living. UNICEF (The United Nation's Children Fund) has been one of the chief resources on the statistics and facts surrounding street children in Latin America and Mexico. They focus on meeting the basic needs of children and protecting their fundamental rights.

According to UNICEF, Mexico City itself has over 1,900,000 street children, of which approximately 240,000 have been totally abandoned by their families. Most street children have some family links, but those who have been abandoned by their families live under bridges, or in city parks. They often resort to petty thefts and other crimes in order to survive. A large number of them (90%) have also been engaging in sniffing glue or using other mind-altering substances that cause brain damage and long-term health problems.

There are over 2 million street kids in Mexico City alone that have been either thrown out of the house by parents who could no longer afford them, or were forced to work the streets selling trinkets, gum, and other items to make money (Oster 1986). Increasingly, these children are the defenseless victims of brutal violence, sexual exploitation, child neglect, chemical addiction, and human rights violations.

The Secretary of Education, Health and Social Development, Javier Vega Camargo, has stated that "the children that live on the streets in Mexico City are exposed to violence, drugs, and AIDS through sexual promiscuity and prostitution." According to Dr. Elena Azaola, there has been a problem of sexual exploitation of these children for a number of years. She has written several books in this area, describing and calling attention to what she calls the "exploitation" of street children, largely for

the sex tourist trade. Her research project, *Boy and Girl Sexual Exploitation in Mexico*, (2000), in cooperation with UNICEF revealed this problem in depth in six cities in Mexico.

Definitions of Street Children

For the purposes of this study, the term “Street children” will be used to describe at least three separate categories of children that make up this subculture. First, there are the two major categories defined by UNICEF which include those known as *market children*. These children work in the streets selling and begging for their survival, but return to their families at night. These children begin working on the streets at early ages to supplement the income of their families. Overall, according to Isabell Molina, the director of the federal system for the Whole Development of the Family, the average age of the children working in the streets is now 7.2 years in Mexico City.

Secondly, there are *homeless street children*, who work, live, and sleep in the streets, often lacking any contact with their families, or have been totally abandoned. Some of these children have run away from their homes because of abuse or violence, and have had to live in the streets on a permanent basis. These children range from 6 to 18 years of age. These homeless street children are of particular interest, as they are the ones largely exploited for sexual recreation mentioned by Dr. Azaola.

Lastly, there are those children I define as *street family children*, who live on the streets alongside their families, and beg for their survival. These groups largely consist of a single mother raising several children in the streets. They sleep in the streets, beg in the streets for their survival, and raise their children on the streets.

These children are from poverty-stricken families, are largely indigenous, and range anywhere from 3-17 years of age. These families and children represent the lowest level of poverty in Mexico, and are also representative of the discrimination that occurs for indigenous persons living in Mexico today. These families have largely been ignored by society and organizations that advocate for the rights of street children, and will be a key focus in this research project along with the two other categories of street children defined by UNICEF.

Facts about Mexico

Known officially as United Mexican States (*Estados Unidos Mexicanos*), Mexico is the third largest nation in Latin America after

Brazil and Argentina, with an estimated population of 107 million inhabitants. Spanish is the official language, with about 8-10% of the population speaking indigenous language groups such as *Nahautl*, a language spoken by the former Aztec civilization (Merrill & Miro 1996).

Historical Development

Mexico is a land of many contrasts. In fact, while Mexico is rich in natural resources, such as oil, gold, silver, and other items, it is also known for its prosperity among the elite, as well as the abject poverty of the people that live there.

In a sense, it is important to understand at least this brief history of Mexico in order to understand the complexities of how the problem of such things as poverty and the subculture of the street children can exist in Mexico. It is not a problem that has cropped up overnight, or one that has been the result of a few years of economic hardship. The fact of poverty, unfortunately, has been at the forefront of Mexico's citizens since before the era of modern history began.

Over the past 10,000 years, Mexico has seen a rather diverse mixture of empires rise and fall. Mexico has been the home of several amazing civilizations, including the Olmecs, the Maya, The Toltecs, The Aztecs, and, of course, the Spanish colonials. Indeed, Mexico has a rich and interesting history, but it is also one that is framed with militarism, rebellion, conquest, oppression, and long-standing poverty (Sierra 1969).

Early Civilizations

The development of agriculture gave rise to several great empires that flourished in Mexico, beginning around 1700 B.C. with the Olmecs. This period was marked by a rise in architectural developments in the shape of large-scale cities such as La Venta, Tres Zapotes, and San Lorenzo near the states of Veracruz and Tabasco. These civilizations introduced hieroglyphic writing and a calendar, as well as many other artistic achievements (Adams 1996). Their influence was felt all over the Mesoamerican portion of the world, including Mexico and Central America for centuries.

The Classic Period

The classic period that followed the Olmecs influence produced some of the greatest cities in the Mesoamerican part of the world, with such

cities as Teotihuacan, which boasted an early population of over 125,000 people by AD 400. Teotihuacan had an advanced urban design with many streets and roads, pyramids, temples, and ceremonial plazas.

The classic Maya civilization would eventually become one of the most advanced cultures in Mesoamerica, with its highly advanced architectural works, its use of writing, astronomy, and mathematics. They could predict the movement of celestial bodies with precision, and even understood the concept of zero in mathematics. The classic period would come to a close approximately 900 AD with the new groups such as the Chichimecs (The Toltecs), and the Mexica (The Aztecs), who were extremely militaristic, and would begin a new era of influence over the Mesoamerican world.

The Post-Classic Period

The post-classic period was marked by the invasion of such groups as the Toltecs and the Aztecs, and lasted until the Spanish conquistador, Hernan Cortez, conquered the Aztecs in 1521. The Aztecs would arrive by the thirteenth century, and would establish their first great city, Tenochtitlan (modern-day Mexico), from which they ruled over central Mexico. The Aztec empire would eventually reach five million people, as the Aztecs continued to conquer other groups and incorporate them into their system.

The Aztec religion reflected their militarism, which included human sacrifice, meant to delay what the Aztecs referred to as the final cataclysmic event that would destroy the known world. Through offering the god, Huitzilopochtli, a sacrifice of a human heart, the Aztecs felt they could delay this apocalypse. These ceremonies took place in Tenochtitlan's main temple, the Templo Mayor.

The Conquest of the Spanish

The arrival of the Europeans in 1521 ushered in a new colonial Spanish empire that would drastically change the course of history in Mexico forever. Hernan Cortes would eventually conquer the Aztecs, and because the Aztec Empire was so vast, the Spanish were easily able to control most of Mexico immediately by superimposing colonial administration on the existing system of rule.

The Religious Conquest

As soon as the Spaniards took Tenochtitlan, of course, they tore down the Aztec's central temple (The Templo Mayor) and built a new Cathedral that still stands today in Mexico's central plaza. The Spanish even added insult to injury by using the rubble of the great temple to build the new cathedral. From that point, the Spanish began spreading the principles of Christianity and Catholicism across the country, thus displacing indigenous beliefs, destroying Aztec idols and other religious items as they found them across the former Aztec lands.

The Revolution and its Consequences on the Economy

The people of Mexico, no longer the mighty Aztec people, but a new population of people known as *criollas*, (Spaniards born in Mexico), *indigenas*, (native peoples of Mexico), and a new race that had been created by the Spaniards, the *mestizos* (children born of mixed Spanish and indigena parentage), were ruled by the Spaniards until September 16, 1810, when Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a rebellious priest, along with fellow priest, Ignacio Allende, formed the roots of what would become a mounting force toward independence from Spain (Bazant 1977).

The Mexican armies grew quickly and the desire for a war for their independence was an idea that most Mexicans understood deep within their souls. In February of 1822, Mexico officially announced its independence, with the Plan of Iguala, which called for three guarantees: an independent constitutional monarchy, Roman Catholicism as the state religion, and equality before the law.

More Economic Hardship

Even though the Mexican people were ecstatic about throwing off the chains of Spanish Imperialism, the Wars for Independence left Mexico in utter disarray. For example, the economy was in shambles. The Spaniards had taken their capital out of the country, and the gold and silver mines were no longer usable. These mines were largely ignored as men joined the ranks of the military to fight for their independence, and during this time, the mines had flooded (Skidmore & Smith 2001).

Even roads had been neglected during this time period, and there was no reliable system of transportation or communication within Mexico. The infrastructure of the country was in complete collapse, or nonexistent. Travel was hazardous, costly, and slow.

There were very few jobs, and unemployment was one of the many problems that faced Mexico after the wars. When jobs were not easily found, men turned to crime, while others stayed in the military. Poverty persisted among the vast majority of the population. Mexico had a classic peasantry, largely known as *campesinos*, or country people, who were mostly poor farmers. Most of these *campesinos* were largely *indigenas*, and of mixed-blood (mestizos). Some of these *campesinos* had to go to the cities to beg in order to survive, a condition that has continued into modern times.

The Power in Mexico

After the wars of independence, there existed two major power bases in Mexico: the church, and the military. While the church was still considered wealthy, the military dominated national politics, and during the forty-year period from 1821 to 1860, Mexico had at least fifty separate presidents, each lasting for an average of less than one year, which continued to destabilize the country. Eventually, the basic means of winning presidential office was through a military coup, which occurred quite often.

War with the United States

Already burdened by years of war over their independence, Mexico was already in a weakened state, and the United States was rapidly moving westward. Spaniards had never found the resources to settle such areas as California and Texas. The best they could do, apparently, was to create a number of small missions in the area.

When Texas finally revolted against Mexico in 1835, and announced their independence from Mexico, Santa Anna was furious, and attempted to put down the revolt. In a battle at the famed Alamo in San Antonio, Santa Anna would kill the Texas defenders to the last man, but would be soundly defeated at San Jacinto, leaving Texas independent. In 1845, the U.S. Congress voted to annex Texas, which the Mexicans perceived as an act of war.

After a brief invasion by the United States in which General Winfield Scott led troops from Veracruz to Mexico City, Mexico was devastated. The treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo brought a formal end to the war in February of 1848. By the terms of the treaty, the Americans paid Mexico a settlement of \$15 million and took the entire expanse of territory from Texas to California, which amounted to about half of Mexico's land.

Occupation by France

After several years of governmental difficulties, on-going wars, troubles with the church and other disputes, peace had still eluded Mexico. One of the major problems in Mexico after the war with America was bankruptcy, in which Mexico angered several European creditors. Seeking to expand its empire and influence, France, under Ferdinand Maximilian commenced a five-year war of occupation which was devastating to the people of Mexico. Yet another invader had come to their domain, and had to be dealt with.

Napoleon III installed the Austrian archduke Maximilian as emperor of Mexico. Another war ensued in Mexico, as rebels attempted to oust the foreign invaders from their country. Finally, in May 1867, Maximilian surrendered and was executed in Queretaro, finally ending all foreign occupation.

The Porfiriato and Revolution

In November of 1876, Porfirio Diaz led what amounted to a military coup and occupied Mexico City by force. He became Mexico's heavy-handed president and would dominate Mexican politics for decades. Even though he was a harsh and cruel dictator, Diaz, for the next thirty-five years would give Mexico some much needed stability. During his time in office, Mexico's economic development improved, as Diaz began a series of improvements to Mexico's infrastructure. New railroads were built, and a new modernization program was undertaken.

Although some progress was made during the regime of Diaz, there were still many problems that existed in the country. While the wealthy prospered during these days, much of Mexico still faced dire poverty. Wages were low, and living conditions were extremely unequal. Around the country, major strikes were taking place by oppressed workers, as well as protests by those peasants who had lost their land to commercial cultivation.

A New Revolution

In 1910, a new revolution began to develop as more and more people became disenchanted with Diaz and his policies. One of the leading critics was Francisco Madero, who argued that Mexico was ready for a democratic form of government. After Madero ran against Diaz in the