

SNOW PACKET

Name _____

"Mexico"

Period _____

Day #3

Read pages 7-10 and answer the following.

1. _____ is Mexico's most important trading partner, accounting for more than three-quarters of its imports and exports.
2. _____ percent of Mexico's population lives below the poverty line.
3. Students wear _____ in primary and secondary schools.
4. The president of Mexico is elected by popular vote for a _____ year period.
5. Mexico has _____ states.
6. Mexico is a major supplier of the illegal drugs _____ and _____ to the U.S. market.
7. **True or False.** There are unemployment benefits in Mexico. _____
8. In 1995, what percentage of women participated in the work force? _____
9. Who is considered the "*jefe de familia*"? _____
10. Who are seen as caretakers of morality and take center stage in the domain of religion? _____



A traditional Yucatecan Maya house. Cozumel, Mexico.

manufacturing industry. The most important sectors were, in diminishing order, machinery, automobiles, textiles, and clothing. The United States is by far the most important trading partner, accounting for more than three-quarters of Mexico's imports and exports. Trade with the United States and Canada increased substantially following the implementation in 1994 of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Mexico is pursuing additional trade agreements with countries in Latin America, as well as with Israel and the European Union to lessen its dependence on the United States.

Division of Labor. The labor force consisted of 38,617,500 persons in 1998, of which 20 percent were employed in the primary sector, almost 25 percent in the secondary sector (especially in manufacturing and construction), and 55 percent in the tertiary sector, which includes commerce and services. Although jobs are formally assigned on the basis of qualifications, access to jobs is crucially mediated by personal networks.

Social Stratification

Classes and Castes. Mexico has a very unequal distribution of wealth, even compared to other Latin American countries. With the introduction of neoliberal economic policies, inequalities have sharpened. In 1998, the top 20 percent of income earners accounted for 55 percent of Mexico's income, while an estimated 27 percent of the population was living below the poverty line. The size of the middle classes has shrunk in recent years.

Although poverty and marginalization are widespread, they are particularly strong in central and southern Mexico and especially in rural areas. An official marginalization index that includes income levels and the availability and quality of services (such as drinking water, sewage, and education) indicates that the smallest settlements are the most underprivileged.

There is a correlation between socioeconomic hierarchy and ethnicity. Among the poorest segments of the population a strong presence of Indian groups can be found. In 1995, almost all communities whose populations were comprised of more than 40 percent native language speakers suffered from high degrees of marginalization. This strongly contrasts with the wealthiest segments of the Mexican population, which are predominantly made up of whites.

Symbols of Social Stratification. Class differences are marked in Mexico and are expressed symbolically in numerous ways. Wealthy Mexicans live in neighborhoods that are sealed off by armed private



Scenic view of downtown Mexico City, Mexico. All major highways in Mexico converge in the capital city.

guards. At the same time, conspicuous consumption and grandeur is an important characteristic of Mexican culture. A prominent medium is the possession of new and expensive cars. Members of the lower middle class put in great financial effort to demonstrate to the outside world their aspirations, sometimes to the detriment of elementary needs.

Wealthy people dress elegantly according to international clothing standards and wear expensive watches and jewelry. Dress codes are very strict in Mexico, especially at work and school. In primary and secondary school, students wear uniforms. Since colonial times, the use of sandals has been associated with the countryside, poverty, and Indians.

An important cultural marker of class difference is access to all sorts of private facilities. Whereas wealthy people and members of the upper middle class send their children to private schools and universities, use private means of transportation, and go to private hospitals and sports clubs, the not-so well-off make use of crowded state-subsidized facilities.

Class differences are also confirmed in certain behavioral rules. One such rule involves the ritual of waiting that a person from a lower position in the social hierarchy has to endure when seeking access to someone at a higher level. When class differences coincide with ethnic distinctions, discriminatory practices are not unusual.

Political Life

Government. Mexico is a federal republic—hence its official name *Estados Unidos Mexicanos*—operating under a centralized government. Governmental powers at the federal level are divided between executive, legislative, and judicial branches, but in political practice the executive, that is, the presidency, has had strong control over the legislative branch. Only in recent years has the legislative branch seen its power increase because of the strengthening of the multiparty system. The president is elected by popular vote for a six-year period and is both the chief of state and head of government. The president appoints cabinet members. The legislative branch is a bicameral National Congress consisting of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The Chamber of Deputies has five hundred members, elected for three-year terms; the Senate has 128 members, elected for six-year terms. In the judicial branch the Supreme Court of Justice is the highest tribunal.

The federation is made up of thirty-one states and the Federal District (the capital). Each state has a governor, who serves a six-year term, and a unicameral legislature. Both are elected by popular vote. Before 1997, the chief of the Federal District was appointed by the president, but has since been elected directly by popular vote. The Federal District also has an Assembly of Representatives. The local administrative level is the municipality, which is governed by a popularly elected mayor and a municipal council for three-year terms. Suffrage is universal and mandatory (but not enforced) for those over the age of eighteen.

Leadership and Political Officials. The modern presidency stands in a long tradition of pre-Columbian rulers (*tlatoani*), Spanish colonial viceroys, and nineteenth century and revolutionary *caudillos*. The president holds great discretionary powers. Power and leadership are attained through the management of personal relations, which are ruled by principles of loyalty, trust, and reciprocity. These informal networks are interconnected in a pyramidal way and form the real centers of decision making. Vertical patron-client relations can be found in all segments of society. Interactions between politicians, union leaders, top bureaucrats, and ordinary people also take place through these networks. In recent years,

academic credentials and technocratic knowledge have become more important than political and electoral experience.

Besides being chief of state and head of government, the president has traditionally been the leader of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which held power from 1929 to 2000. During much of the twentieth century, Mexico was a one-party democracy. The PRI emerged from the revolution and incorporated mass organizations of workers, peasants, and urban middle classes. Because of its particular origins, its longevity in power, and the influence of diverse interest groups, the PRI is difficult to classify ideologically. There are two other significant parties in Mexico. The conservative National Action Party (PAN) began enjoying electoral success at the state level in 1985. The social-democratic Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) emerged as a breakaway movement from the PRI in 1987 and began governing Mexico City in 1997. Both the PAN and the PRD aim at democratization, but the PRD also proposes a more equal distribution of wealth. The dominance of the PRI in federal elections was finally broken on 2 July 2000, when the candidate of the PAN won a stunning victory with 43 percent of the vote.

Social Problems and Control. Both petty and organized crime increased in the 1990s. Muggings and burglaries, increasingly violent, became widespread. Drug-related violence constituted another serious cause of concern. Public security has thus become a key issue for ordinary citizens and the authorities. At the same time, the police and the judiciary system are widely believed to be ineffective and lack public credibility, partially due to unresolved high-profile political assassinations and corruption. This has led to incidents of people taking the law into their own hands. Paid neighborhood watches are common wherever people can afford them. Private security guards no longer patrol only at banks and government buildings but also at medium-sized offices and shops. In response, the government founded an additional police force in 1999, the National Preventive Police.

Military Activity. Mexico has had civilian presidents since 1946 and has not been involved in international disputes in recent decades. The primary role of the military is the maintenance of internal order. The Ministry of National Defense (the army and air force) and the marines together comprised an armed force consisting of almost 240,000 members in 1998. Military expenditures have increased substantially in recent years and amounted to \$2.5 billion (U.S.) in 1996, accounting for almost 1 percent of the GDP. In recent years the military has been involved in two serious problems: the armed uprising in the state of Chiapas and the struggle against drugs. Mexico is a major supplier of marijuana and heroin to the U.S. market and is the primary transshipment country for cocaine from South America. In 1998 the government spent \$147 million (U.S.) to combat drug trafficking, an amount that has increased spectacularly in recent years.

Social Welfare and Change Programs

As part of its revolutionary heritage, the state provides welfare facilities for most Mexicans. In urban centers, but not in rural areas, health facilities are mostly well equipped. Based on the revolutionary constitution of 1917, education is provided freely by the state. People who have worked in the formal economy receive small pensions after they retire. There are no unemployment benefits. After 1982, the state's ability to uphold social expenditures was seriously undermined by economic crises, the financial burden of external debt, and the adoption of structural adjustment policies. A major government initiative, the National Solidarity Program, was launched at the end of the 1980s to attempt to counteract this development and revitalize social policies. The program was based on a shared obligation



A scribe works with a client on a sidewalk in Mexico City. Beside them are papier-mâché figures for a Holy Week festival.

by the state and local communities to implement projects aimed at improving the standard of living. The National Solidarity Program was practically discontinued with the election of a new president in 1994, and replaced with new, but less ambitious, programs. Given the magnitude of Mexico's problems of poverty, unemployment and underemployment, and deficient social services, the effects of these programs have been modest.

Nongovernmental Organizations and Other Associations

Several political pressure groups in Mexico have founded powerful organizations. Very influential are the national business associations that have sections in all states and major cities. The most important are the Confederation of Employers of the Mexican Republic, the Coordinating Council of Entrepreneurs, and the Confederation of National Chambers of Commerce.

In recent decades, numerous organizations and associations have emerged around particular social issues. They strive to be independent from political parties and openly battle government-controlled organizations. There has also been a tendency to form national alliances of local and regional organizations. Two large networks of peasant organizations are the National Union of Regional Autonomous Peasant Organizations and the National Coordinating Committee "Plan de Ayala."

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOS) have also emerged in urban areas because of the inadequate conditions in housing, transport, public services, and security. The most important of these is the National Coordinating Committee of Urban Popular Movements. In Mexico City, the Association of Neighborhoods emerged after the 1985 earthquake. Indigenous movements have proliferated in recent years, founding the National Indigenous Congress. In the 1990s, NGOs focusing on the defense of human rights have become influential. They are a response to political violence and police brutality. The environmental movement is gradually becoming more active in Mexico.

Gender Roles and Statuses

Division of Labor by Gender. The degree of economic participation of women was 35 percent in 1995, while that of men was about 75 percent. Nevertheless, female economic participation is increasing rapidly. In addition, it is generally assumed that many women are employed in nonregistered and underpaid informal activities. Women also generally earn less than men and their level of educational is lower. Most women are economically active when they are young (between twenty and twenty-four years of age).

Although the political arena is strongly dominated by men, the presence of women in public space has become more common place. In the early twenty-first century, for example, the leadership of major political parties was in the hands of female politicians, as was the government of Mexico City and the chair of Mexico's largest union. The involvement of women in numerous social movements has also been significant.

The Relative Status of Women and Men. Although women and men are equal before the law, clear differences persist in terms of authority and privileges. Women play crucial roles in the family, but even here the male is "chief of the family" (*jefe de familia*). Women are seen as the caretakers of morality and hence take center stage in the domain of religion.

In assigning males and females to different economic, political, and social roles, Mexicans can make use of complex and sometimes contradictory cultural representations of masculinity and femininity. The two key cultural icons for defining femininity are La Malinche and the Virgin of Guadalupe. The myth of La Malinche refers to the Indian woman who was given to conqueror Hernán Cortés in 1519. During the remaining part of the conquest she was his interpreter and "mistress." La Malinche is the collaborator and traitor, but also the sexually violated who gave birth to an illegitimate son, the first *mestizo*. In contrast to La Malinche, the Virgin of Guadalupe represents suffering and sacrifice. This has given rise to the image of the submissive, self-sacrificing, but virtuous woman (*la abnegada*). Together these myths explain the ambiguity attached to defining females. The key concept for defining masculinity is machismo, which is associated with violence, power, aggressiveness, and sexual assertiveness. These general cultural representations have formed the basis for ideas of "natural" male dominance and power and female suffering and motherhood. They have been influential in the imagery of Mexican men and women, but they are increasingly considered simple stereotypes. Under the influence of profound social and cultural transformations in an increasingly urbanized Mexico, perceptions of masculinity and femininity are shifting continuously.