



# Cinco de Mayo: What it Really Means

**Kara Lynch**

It's May 5<sup>th</sup>. You can expect the “Cinco de Drinko” hashtags followed by Americans bar hopping in sombreros. But what's rarely noted is the cultural and historical significance of the commemorated holiday. So what exactly does Cinco de Mayo represent for the Mexican culture and why do we still celebrate it today?

“Cinco de Mayo” translates to the “5<sup>th</sup> of May” in Spanish and contrary to common belief, is not Mexico's Independence Day. Cinco de Mayo celebrates the Mexican victory over France at the Battle of Puebla in 1862. Before we can understand the value of this day, let's back track to the social climate of Mexico, post battle.

In 1857, the Reform War began in Mexico. This Civil War was caused by a divide between Liberals, who believed in separation of church and state, and Conservatives who favored a strong union between the Roman Catholic Church and the Mexico. After this brutal war, Mexico was left bankrupt. Mexico owed Great Britain, France and Spain a great deal of money they didn't have, leaving these nations angry. Representatives from the three nations arrived in Mexico to settle the score. Great Britain and Spain left peacefully after Mexico agreed to pay them at a later time, but France stayed as they remained unconvinced.

On the morning of May 5<sup>th</sup>, France moved in to attack the city of Puebla. The French strongly underestimated Mexico, thinking it would be an easy defeat. About 460 French soldiers died while Mexico lost about 83 of their own. Cinco de Mayo celebrates the Mexican victory at the Battle of Puebla on May 5<sup>th</sup> 1862. Later, France wound up occupying Mexico for a few years. Nonetheless, Cinco de Mayo remains a significant moment in history.

So what makes the holiday still so popular today? Other than the fact that Americans will find any excuse to drink, there is more to why Cinco de Mayo is widely celebrated in America. In the 60's, as the Civil Rights Movement grew, Mexican American activists celebrated the holiday as a symbol of pride in their Mexican heritage. As the years passed, the holiday became commercialized thanks to the introduction of Mexican beers in America. What I tell ya? It's all about the booze. In 1989, Modelo and Corona beer were introduced around the same time that Cinco de Mayo falls. The now widely famous companies advertise with slogans like, "Corona de Mayo." In 2013, Americans bought more beer for Cinco de Mayo than the Super Bowl and even St. Paddy's Day! For an Irish woman like me, this is difficult to believe.

Cinco de Mayo is barely celebrated by Mexicans as a result of the commercialization of the holiday and the lack of respect and understanding most Americans have for it. What Cinco de Mayo truly signifies is much more valuable than good beer. The Mexican defeat against the French army was a true underdog tale. The French militia was larger, had better weapons and better training. The Mexicans won with courage and tenacity alone proving it is not the size of the dog in the fight, but the size of the fight in the dog. We would all be doing the world a service if we remembered this every May 5<sup>th</sup>.

Resources:

<https://www.thoughtco.com/cinco-de-mayo-the-battle-of-puebla-2136649>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/05/business/cinco-de-mayo-facts-history.html>

Image Credit: <https://www.businessinsider.com/what-cinco-de-mayo-really-celebrates-2018-5>