

A CENTURY OF

Spanish Emigration to Mexico

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From the late nineteenth century to 1950, Spanish immigration made the Spaniards the largest foreign community in Mexico and the second largest today. Several factors contributed to this: Spain experienced a mass exodus around 1880, particularly from Galicia and Asturias, and Mexico's liberal policies attracted foreign colonists to populate vast uncivilized tracts of land. Both countries were spurred by the common language and the links established throughout the colonial period. However, compared to countries in the extreme south of the Americas, Spanish migration to Mexico was relatively small, reaching, for example, just 10 percent of the flow of migrants to Argentina in the same period. Despite this, Mexican figures show that between 1895 and 1940, Spaniards constituted the largest group of foreign migrants. In 1950, they took second place to U.S. migrants.¹

When the Mexican Revolution broke out, about 30,000 Spaniards were living in more than 20 states, with the largest communities in Mexico City, Puebla, Veracruz and Yucatan. Things changed later. By 1980, the capital continued to have the largest Spanish community, but second place was held by the State of Mexico because it

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¹ For an overview, see Delia Salazar Anaya's book, *La población extranjera en México (1895-1990)*, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City, 1996, 489 pp.



Monument to the Emigrant, Royal Spain Club of Mexico.

Photos reprinted courtesy of the Royal Spain Club of Mexico



Women from Mexico's Spanish community in traditional dress.

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included a large part of Mexico City's metropolitan area.

Migration was initially 85 percent male, but by 1940, women were 35 percent of immigrants. The fact that the censuses asked about both nationality and place of birth made it rather difficult to measure the real size of the migrant population since many immigrants opt for Mexican nationality after a few year's residence, although they maintain links to their places of origin.

During the Porfirio Díaz regime, the Spanish immigrant community began to be particularly enterprising. The prototype of the Spanish immigrant was a young man, underemployed by a relative or countryman. After a

short time, he used his savings to start his own business, which might be a small shop, transport or a modest manufacturing establishment, like a soft drink bottling plant. With time, he built his investment up into a medium-sized concern and reinvested, in turn attracting more immigrants. A balance between the sexes became possible because the successful immigrant sought to marry "a home-town girl," although many also married immigrants' daughters, born in Mexico and therefore Mexican citizens. These women escaped the notice of the census takers at the same time that they contributed to creating an endogenous community.



Mexico boasts a singular mixture of Spanish and indigenous cultures.

Spanish migration during the Porfirio Díaz period produced several large capitalists, among them, Iñigo Noriega, from Colombres, Asturias, who developed agriculture and agribusiness in the Chalco Valley; Angel Urraza, a Basque, who invested in the cotton industry and, later, in partnership with the U.S. company B.F. Goodrich, in rubber; and Adolfo Prieto, who became prominent in the iron and steel industries. These three men represent the lofty heights reached by Spanish immigrants.

Spaniards were the victims of the Mexican Revolution's xenophobia, although they were never the brunt of the kind of aggression suffered by



The first May roses to bloom in Madrid's Retiro Park are sent to Mexico's Spanish community, which takes them as an offering to Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City.

Table 1**Spanish Citizens Residing in Mexico**

	1895	1900	1910	1921	1930	1950	1960	1970	1980
Male	11 072	13 395	22 899	20 203	21 646	23 854	29 826	18 128	17 962
Female	2 655	2 907	6 642	6 472	7 209	13 686	19 811	12 910	14 278
Total	13 727	16 302	29 541	26 675	28 855	37 540	49 637	31 038	32 240

Table 2**Residents of Mexico Who Were Born in Spain**

	1895	1900	1910	1921	1930	1940	1950	1960
Male	9 544	13 290	22 749	21 067	27 939	14 397	17 036	16 313
Female	2 327	2 886	6 583	8 052	19 300	6 625	9 840	2 507
Total	11 871	16 176	29 932	29 119	47 239	21 022	26 876	18 820

Source: Delia Salazar Anaya, *La población extranjera en México (1895 - 1990)*, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City, 1996.

Chinese immigrants. After the revolution, Spaniards gave over their predominance in heavy industry to multinational capital and went into different branches of medium-sized industry, trade and services, for example, the hotel business.

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lican refugees from the Spanish Civil War. They went into different activities, everything from academia and sophisticated intellectual circles, to the professions, commerce and the service sector. These Spanish migrants have had qualitatively the largest impact of any group in Mexico's modern history. Everyday language distinguishes between "old residents" and refugees, which initially clashed because of their opposing political positions. However, with the years, the differences have disappeared.

Spaniards have constituted a community with different profiles of their own through creating organizations by province of origin: the Asturian

Center of Mexico, the Galician Center, the Catalanian Orpheus and the Basque Center, as well as the Royal Spain Club which unites Iberians from all the different provinces. Unlike their brethren in the Southern Cone, whose organizations serve as credit unions, in Mexico, they have been social clubs to maintain community ties. In addition, the Spanish Beneficial Society, together with the Spanish Covadonga Board, sponsor the Spanish Hospital.

After 1980, Spanish migration dropped considerably given Spain's economic recovery. Spanish Mexicans, however, continue to be a tightly-knit group, with an identity and a profile of their own in Mexican society. ❧