



The Pastry War: Mexican History 1838 to 1839



Pastry War



Date:	November 27, 1838 – March 9, 1839 (3 months, 1 week, and 3 days)
Location:	Veracruz, Mexico
Result:	French victory

- Mexican government agrees to pay damages of 600,000 pesos.

This is France. What do you think of when you hear France? Baguettes, the Eiffel Tower... definitely not an angry French pastry chef who starts The Pastry War after his shop gets looted... right? Because that's not what the French would do... right? Wrong. Because there most definitely was an angry French pastry chef who started The Pastry War after his shop got looted, and that war eventually led to the French invading Mexico, which led to 75 years of civil wars and coup d'états. So, how did a pastry chef cause all of this?

The Pastry War: Mexico vs France 1838

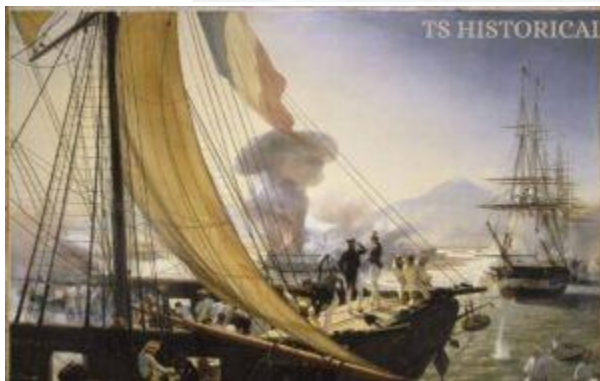
Pastry War in Mexico in the 1830s. It's paradise. Who am I kidding, it's not. It is most definitely not paradise. Political turmoil, armed rebellions as far as the eye can see, territories seceding left and right... need I go on? In essence, Mexico at the time was in chaos. Pure, unadulterated chaos. The Centralist Republic of Mexico (the government at the time), was itself built upon shaky ground.

The 1828 Mexican general election was fraught with controversy; the winner, Manuel Pedraza, was chased out of the country by Gen. Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. After **Santa Anna** chased the winner out of the country, Vicente Guerrero became President after (since his supporters controlled the legislature). 8 months after Guerrero became



President, his opponents kidnapped and killed him. After almost 6 years of chaos [that word seems to be used a lot when describing a central American country in the mid-nineteenth century... funny], the Centralist Republic of Mexico was established. It would take a lot of time to go into the details; and plus, you clicked on this Article for the pastry chef who started a war. Not about Mexican politics.

The pastry chef. The problem with the Centralist Republic of Mexico was that it was responsible for the stuff that happened in the aftermath of the 1828 general election. Do you know how I said it was “fraught with controversy”? That might have been an understatement. There were riots in the streets, and several shops owned by French citizens were sacked and looted.



The angry French citizens appealed to their monarch, **King Louis Philippe**. For the time being, he did nothing. In 1832, however, one French pastry chef who went by the name of Monsieur Remontel said that Mexican officers looted his pastry shop. He complained to the king and asked for 60,000 pesos as compensation. His shop was only worth about 1,000 pesos. King Louis-Philippe had had enough complaints from French shop owners. He demanded that 600,000 pesos should be paid to the shop owners who suffered. However, 600,000 pesos was a lot of money back then. The average Mexican only made one peso a day in the 1830s.

The Mexican government refused to pay, saying that the amount of money the French government was requesting was far too high. The French government snapped. They sent a fleet of ships under the command of Adm. Charles Baudin to blockade the



Mexican city of Veracruz. Veracruz was Mexico's biggest port; by blocking Veracruz, the French government effectively blocked Mexico's import/export business. Mexico, quite obviously, didn't like this. This all happened on April 16, 1838.

The Mexican president said that "Mexico would not pay one peso unless the blockade was lifted." Over seven months later, in November, after diplomacy failed to solve the problem, the French fired at the fort at the entrance to the port. Mexico declared war on France. Unfortunately for the Mexicans, the French at the time were still a global empire, and so, the French had far more resources and manpower than the Mexicans.

In less than a month, the French occupied Veracruz and captured the entire Mexican Navy. General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna (I told you he'd pop up again) came out of retirement, devised a smashing plan to kick the French out, went to the Mexican government, laid out his plan, got it approved, and marched to Veracruz with 3200 men. His invasion failed, his leg was wounded, cut off, and was given a full military burial. It was at this point that Mexico realized that they were in trouble.

They then asked the British to mediate between themselves and the French, and the French withdrew their troops. That was the end of the so-called Pastry War — in all, there were 288 casualties caused by this war. However, neither side fully trusted the other after the war, and Mexico didn't pay the 600,000 pesos, so France used the payment as one of the justifications for invading Mexico in 1861.

This caused the Mexican government to collapse, and then the next one also collapsed in less than four years, and then the next one collapsed in less than a decade, and then the next government was basically a dictatorship, and then that one collapsed, and then there was a ten-year civil war, and then finally a somewhat stable government was established. This entire chain of events was started... because of one French pastry chef.