

General Overview of Guatemalan History

- 1773 Antigua, at that point the capital city, is destroyed by two earthquakes;
three years later (1776) the capital is moved to Guatemala City
- 1821 Independence from Spanish rule (September 15th)
- 1871 Justo Rufino Barrios invites protestant churches to Guatemala to counter Catholic influence
- 1882 First Presbyterian Church in Guatemala established
- 1944-45 Ubico (dictator) is overthrown by popular revolution, and Juan José Arevalo becomes president
- 1950 Pres. Arbenz promotes land reform; the United Fruit Company, which owns a lot of land, sees "red"
- 1954 US gov't buys into idea that Arbenz is a 'communist' and backs a coup by Castillo Armas and the right-wing National Liberation Movement.
US planes bomb specific military targets and CIA agents actively work against the Guatemalan government, forcing Pres. Arbenz to resign.
- 1958-82 Series of military or military-dominated governments
- 1960 Sosa and Turcios Lima rebel against corrupt President Fuentes, who lets CIA use Guatemala soil to train mercenaries for the Bay of Pigs Invasion
- 1976 Guatemala suffers a devastating earthquake that kills 25,000 and leaves many more homeless, increasing tensions between rich and poor
- 1981-83 Attempted genocide of Mayans by government. '82 Rios Montt (neo-pentecostal) seizes power in a bloodless coup. Guatemala censored by UN for human rights violations.
- 1983 Montt ousted by Mejía Víctores and begins transition to a "formal democracy"
- 1985 Cerezo (civilian) becomes President; military still the power behind the throne
- 1990 Serrano (neo-pentecostal lay preacher, but corrupt) becomes President

1993 Leon Carpio is elected after Serrano is accused of trying to dissolve Congress

1996 Pres. Alvaro Arzu gets Peace Accords signed, "ending" 36-year Civil War

1998 Bishop Juan Gerardi assassinated 2 days after publishing respected human rights report that held the gov't responsible for 93% of the violence during the Civil War

1999-2007 Gov't continues to be corrupt and politically ineffective. Common violence, drug-running, gangs, and poverty increase. Pres Portillo, then Pres Berger. Retired General Rios Montt was Pres of Congress part of that time.

2008 Alvaro Colom becomes president; corruption and violence continue...