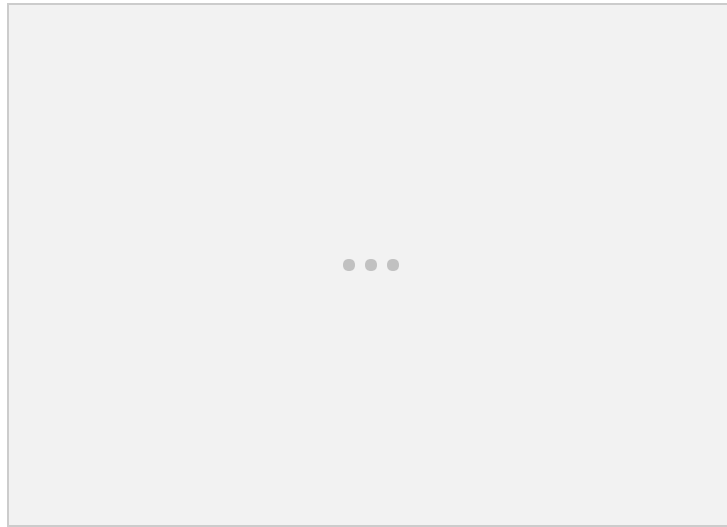


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## **Tlatelolco Massacre**



It was the year of 1968 in Mexico and all throughout the nation students lived with the stories of bravery and revolution happening around the world. "The belief we had when we were young back then was that we had the capacity to be free and to live a life with no interference from the President, the Church and our parents" says Paul Alvarez, one of the members of the student movement in 1968 (Poniatowska). The students' thirst of independence and a government whom was desperate to create a decent

worldly impression for the coming Olympic Games of 1968 were key factors that led towards the Massacre in Tlatelolco.

It all began July 22, 1968, two different high schools began a fight over a football game. The police intervened in order to stop the fight but they went too far and physically abused many of the students who had nothing to do with the football fight. Many parents, teachers and students did not agree with the actions brought forth by the government and began to peacefully protest around the city. "The police repression was of such magnitude that transformed that juvenile problem into one of the most serious political problems that the country has ever lived", According to Humberto Masacho, a member of the student movement of 1968 (Poniatowska). It is understandable for him to say this since he was being harassed by the police but maybe if all of these problems and chaos would not have happened around the time the Olympics were going to be held in Mexico things would not have blown out of proportion.

During that time, the government was trying to have complete control over the whole nation because they felt that their main priority was to be the best host to the Olympic Games and have an impeccable image. "For the president of the republic it was a time were him, his government and Mexico were going to be in the glass display cabinet of worldly attention... he was extremely proud of his capacity of administration, of organization and some little students were going to put that in doubt?", Humberto Masacho, a

member of the student movement of 1968 (Discovery). Personally, in a way the government's reactions are understandable and they still repeat today. We saw similar reactions not so long ago in China when it was hosting the Olympics games. The government even rebuilt and renovated parts of the city where they knew tourists were going to pass by and they made the world see that their government meant business and was dedicated on keeping things under control. Obviously, the people who lived in that area were forced to relocate and no one was bothered about it. I believe, the Mexican government, specially the president, felt the same way. He did not care if he was being unjust or not, he could just not have a revolution two weeks before the inauguration of the games.

As the government restrictions and apprehensions grew so did the anger of the students. The protest turned into riots and the city became a scenery of violent confrontations with cars set on fire and complete chaos. The confrontations turned so violent that even army tanks were put in the streets and a big amount of soldiers were brought out every time there was a protest. "Thus, as we were being apprehended, instead of stopping us they would just anger us even more and we would rebel back making the movement grow even stronger. Now, it wasn't just the students, professors and parents, the majority of our nation was on our side," Ignacia Rodriguez, leader of the student movement of 1968 (Poniatowska). "President Diaz Ordaz represented to us the most absurd, the most negative image of a

presidential figure... he was a very ugly man with huge dentures so we would scream at him "chango hocicon" (long-snouted chimpanzee), racist, and repressor; all this insults towards him were a relief for us because we were all fed up with our president" said Humberto Masacchio, member of the student movement of 1968 (Poniatowka). All the students really wanted was to have a chance to speak with the president and negotiate the situation but the president never gave them the change or even bothered to listen to what the students were asking for, which was for more respect towards them and freedom. Instead, a few months before the massacre the president gave a speech to the nation saying that he had seen and dealt with enough. " We have been tolerant to critical excess but everything has it's limits and we can not allow for the juridic order to keep being broken like it has happened in front of our eyes," President Diaz Ordaz (Discovery). This was his last warning.

On October 2, 1968 at six thirty pm during a very large meeting in the plaza of Tlatelolco, gun shots were coming from building Chihuahua towards the students, parents, teachers, children and soldiers in the plaza. Confusion and destruction began. "It was a horrible thing! Everyone was running everywhere, people would fall death, people would trip over the death and I was left there, below that flagpole. I couldn't get up, my legs would bend and one of my students came up to me and told me to get up and leave or I was going to get killed. My student got in front of me and I saw a bullet go

across his head, I never found out where the bullet came from, all I know is that he felled right there in front of me. It was the most horrible moment of my life" university professor, Fausto Trejo (Discovery). It is unbelievable the horrible things people witnessed that day and it most likely will stay in their minds forever.

As I saw the documentary, when the students and the teachers were describing the horrible events they lived, they got very sentimental and it looked like all of it had just happened the day before. One thing was for the government to keep things under control but another thing is to go as far as harming the people who, at first, supported you, and you, as a government, is your duty to protect. Not only were the citizens attacked, the military betrayed itself as well. "A big part of the military did not know that it was actually other officials shooting at them and not the students... they did not know what was going on everything was out of control! The military began to shoot upward, towards the building, were the other soldiers disguised as civilians were shooting... as the shooting got worse some of the soldiers were trying to protect us and told us to lay down in the floor.... those soldiers that tried to protect us deserve all my respect, and that day they showed us a gesture of human solidarity that I will never stop thanking" mentioned Humberto Masacchio, member of the student movement of 1968 (Poniatowska).

It is comforting to know that not all of the soldiers were corrupt and that they were some honest and noble soldiers trying to defend innocent citizens, too bad there were not many of them like that.

The next day all the corpses and people that were injured around the corpses were gathered and gotten rid off in the cruelest ways. The plaza was clean from all the blood and the public was told that the students began to fire so the police and the military had to get involved. The president himself gave a speech to the entire nation explaining what had happened. "From the roof top of the building Chihuahua, they fired perversely against the soldiers and against their own colleagues, do to their nervousness at the moment or their lack of ability with weapons, that they had obtained by themselves, they were not able to control the gun shots and not only did they injured soldiers but their own colleagues as well," said President Diaz Ordaz (Discovery). This is an outrage and it is unbelievable how can someone can just get away with so much, it just goes to show you that with money and power people can do everything.

I, as a Mexican citizen, feel so ashamed and disgusted for this kind of behavior and cruelty that happened and still happens in my country because none of the people who came up with this and executed this plan have been punished. As I was growing up in Mexico I was always taught to love my country, our national heroes and respect our flag and president. I even met President Ernesto Zedillo when I was in first grade and I felt so much respect

towards him. It is sad that as you grow up you begin to see how things truly are and how they are not as pretty as they make you believe.

Decades after October second, people in Mexico and especially Tlatelolco have tried to forget what happened that day and tried to move forward. The survivors of that day still pay tribute to their colleagues every anniversary and university professor, Fausto Trejo, speaks with young students this days giving them a tour of La Plaza De Las Tres Culturas and stopping at the memorial of October second and tries to explain to them how important and brave this battle was against the government. "October 2, 1968 the president of the republic won a battle but lost the war. He wanted to go down in history as a builder of nations and ended up in history as a repressor of students who protested in peace. After this incident the longest journey towards democracy began and decades later there were trusty and clean presidential campaigns in a Mexico somewhat better," said Sergio Aguayo, a historian (Poniatowska).

Sadly, recent events happening in Mexico are teaching us that not only does history repeat itself but that also in the decades that have passed the government has if not remained but rather turned even more corrupt.

Today, 43 Mexican students are missing after heading home from a protest against the abuse of the government on its peoples. Tlatelolco has not been a lesson to the dormant civilians who have conformed to the corruption of their government; maybe this 43 youth will finally make a change.

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