

## Section 2: Independence

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- Key Terms
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## Chapter

# 2

## Mexican Independence

With revolutionary movements sweeping around the globe, and with the successes of both the Americans and Haitians defeating world powers greater than Spain,<sup>94</sup> it was only a matter of time before the Mexicans caught the revolutionary spirit and began the process of overthrowing the tyranny of Spain. In the process to overthrow Spanish rule, several key revolutionary leaders emerged to lead Mexico towards its independence.

### Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla

Father Hidalgo was a *criollo* but was not a typical priest as he was a known gambler and even had three children with two different women. Despite his flaws as a priest, he was remembered as the father of the movement that pushed Mexico towards independence.<sup>95</sup>

Early on September 16, 1810, Father Hidalgo rang the town's church bells to call the people to mass. He was about to be arrested as a conspirator against the crown. As the people assembled he gave his famous speech, *the grito de Dolores*, or Cry of Dolores. This speech started the conflict that eventually freed Mexico from Spain.<sup>96</sup> Below is a small portion of *the grito de Dolores*:

“My children: a new dispensation comes to us today. Will you receive it? Will you free yourselves? Will you recover the lands stolen three hundred years ago from your forefathers by the hated Spaniards? We must act at once....Will you not

defend your religion and your rights as true patriots? Long live our Lady of Guadalupe! Death to bad government! Death to the [Peninsulares]!”<sup>97</sup>

Hidalgo gained further support for the rebellion by choosing the Virgin of Guadalupe as a symbol for the cause. She became a unifying force for the Mexican people.

Unfortunately, Hidalgo had no military training and was not able to control his army and his rebellion lost momentum.<sup>98</sup> He was captured and found guilty of treason. He was executed in front of a firing squad. He was decapitated and his head was placed on a pole and displayed publicly as a warning to other independence fighters.<sup>99</sup>

### Josè Maria Morelos y Pavòn

Josè Morelos replaced Hidalgo as the leader of the revolution. Unlike Hidalgo, Morelos was a *mestizo*. And also unlike Hidalgo, Morelos was a brilliant military leader who used guerrilla tactics to win several key victories towards Mexican independence.<sup>100</sup>

Because Morelos was a *mestizo* and brought the lower classes into the revolution, the *peninsulares* and *criollos* became afraid of mob violence (social revolution) and preferred Spanish rule to Morelos' rebellion. The *peninsulares* and *criollos* preferred a king rather than lose their power in Mexico. Soon the *criollos* and *peninsulares* had hunted down Morelos. They placed him in front of the firing squad and executed him. He too was decapitated and his head was placed on the same wall as Hidalgo's.<sup>101</sup>

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### Agustín de Iturbide

One of the people ordered to hunt down Morelos was Agustín de Iturbide.<sup>102</sup> For a decade, he had fought *against* the rebels on the side of the Spanish king.<sup>103</sup> However, Iturbide eventually got removed from his command because he was a cruel leader. This caused tension between Iturbide and his commanding officer and Iturbide wanted revenge for being removed from his command.

Iturbide met with Vicente Guerrero, the new leader of the rebellion and Iturbide's former enemy, and planned a coup d'état to join Guerrero to overthrow the Spanish colonial authorities. Together, Guerrero and Iturbide created the Plan of Iguala.<sup>104</sup>

### Plan of Iguala

The Plan of Iguala was comprised of three key components. First, there would be equal treatment under the law for both *peninsulares* and *criollos*. Second, Catholicism would be the official religion of Mexico. And third, Mexico would be a moderate monarchy. There was even talk of inviting a European prince to govern Mexico.

The three parts of the plan were known as union, religion, and independence, or the Three Guarantees. The Three Guarantees were represented on the Mexican flag. Red represents the union of America and Europe, aka the blood of the *criollos* and the *peninsulares*. The color white represents the purity of Catholicism. Green represents the hope of independence.<sup>105</sup>

The Plan of Iguala was actually a compromise. Instead of asking for the death of the *peninsulares*, Iturbide actually showed them some favor.<sup>106</sup> Iturbide would thus be the one to lead Mexico to independence from Spain in 1821.

### Impact of Independence

Iturbide had freed Mexico from Spain by staging a coup d'état. In doing so, several bad precedents were set that would plague Mexico well into the twentieth century.

First, revolutionary movements were almost always preceded by a plan that outlined the goals of the rebellion in the hopes of gaining wider

support from the people.<sup>107</sup> For a century, the military was very much involved in politics and continually pursued gaining wealth from the nation.<sup>108</sup> And lastly, the precedent of coup d'état would be well established in Mexican politics. Instead of using the vote to remove a leader, more often than not, a Mexican leader would be overthrown through a coup.

### Iturbide Takes Power

It did not take long for Iturbide to elevate himself to the position of emperor of Mexico. In fact, he made himself *Generalísimo de Tierra y mar* (highest general of the earth and sea) and gave himself a large salary.<sup>109</sup> However, Iturbide's reign would not last long as he created and inherited many problems that Mexico faced as an infant nation. In the end, Iturbide was not an emperor, but rather he was a *caudillo*. A *caudillo* was an appealing military leader with a personal following.<sup>110</sup> This would not be enough for Iturbide to sustain any type of control over Mexico.

### Iturbide's Issues

The independence movement had left Mexico in a bit of chaos. First, the silver mining was destroyed which meant the national currency lost its backing. Secondly, individuals that had money and capital were investing their money outside of Mexico rather than re-investing it into their own country. Furthermore, agricultural production had decreased causing food prices to rise. And lastly, Iturbide had a large standing army and over 40,000 officers he had to pay.

Although Iturbide inherited several key problems of an independent Mexico, he also did not do much to make the people of Mexico like him. Iturbide was criticized for nepotism. He awarded noble titles to his family and even made the birthdays of some of his family members national holidays. If a person wanted to see Iturbide, that person had to kneel and kiss his hand.<sup>111</sup>

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However, Iturbide's greatest mistake came when he would set a horrific precedent that plagued Mexico for the remainder of the nineteenth century. He became the first Mexican leader to get rid of a legislative branch that had disagreed with him.<sup>112</sup> The people's voice in government was thus eliminated.

### The End of Iturbide's Reign




Iturbide was not a popular leader amongst many people in Mexico. Thus, Iturbide did not remain in power for very long. A man who became a major player in Mexican politics for the next several decades, Antonio de Padua María Severino López de Santa Anna y Pérez de Lebrón (many just called him **Santa Anna**), sensed Iturbide was losing popularity and could be overthrown. Thus, he entered the scene with his own plan, the Plan de Veracruz, in which Mexico was turned into a republic.<sup>113</sup> Iturbide would eventually be arrested for treason and met his demise in front of a Mexican firing squad in 1824.<sup>114</sup>

### Section 2 Review:

1. Define the following terms: tyranny, conspirator, *grito de Dolores*, treason, guerrilla, coup d'état, Plan of Iguala, precedent, *caudillo*, capital, nepotism, Plan de Veracruz, republic.
2. What role did Father Hidalgo, José Morelos, and Agustín de Iturbide play in the Mexican independence movement?
3. Explain the Plan of Iguala and how it is represented on the Mexican flag.
4. Why did Iturbide not last long as the leader of an independent Mexico? Why is his fall from power, and later his death, a bit ironic?

## Section 3: Creating a Constitution

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## Forming a Republic

**I**turbide's reign as emperor was short lived. After his execution, the Mexicans wanted to create a republican government. However, even though most Mexicans wanted to create a republic, they could not agree on how to establish their new government. Thus, two competing groups emerged, the centralists and the federalists, who fought for power in an attempt to mold the new Mexican republican government.

### Centralism vs. Federalism

Centralism was based on the idea that the new Mexican government should have a strong central or federal government. Centralists also argued that the Catholic Church should maintain a strong political influence within the new Mexican nation.

Federalism argued that the new nation should maintain a weak central or federal government. Federalists believed that political strength should be held in the states within Mexico. Federalists also wanted to end the political influence of the Church.<sup>115</sup>

### The Constitution of 1824

Eventually the centralists and the federalists compromised and created the Constitution of 1824 which organized Mexico into a republic with 19 states and four territories. The federal government's power was separated into three branches: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial. No one branch would have all the power.

Clearly, there were some similarities to the Constitution of 1824 and the U.S. Constitution. Just like in the United States, the job of the executive in Mexico was to execute the laws, the legislative branch made the laws, and the judicial

branch interpreted the laws. The division of power within the Mexican federal government pleased the federalists.

The Mexican legislative branch, or Congress, had two houses: the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. Each state would get two representatives in the Senate but representation in the Chamber of Deputies would be based on each state's population. The executive, or President, would be elected by state legislatures and serve a four year term.

The centralists also got something they wanted out of the Constitution of 1824. Under the new constitution, the Catholic Church would get to maintain its power. Furthermore, in times of crisis, the President was given emergency powers and was allowed to make decisions like a dictator without consulting the Congress.<sup>116</sup>

### Caudillos

*Caudillos* (charismatic military leaders with a personal followings) did not show much respect for the newly created constitution. *Caudillos* had armies at their personal command and they thus fought for power after independence. Their power came from their charm and the personal alliances they were able to develop by promising a material benefit to their followers, or clients, who returned the favor by giving their loyalty to the *caudillo*. This practice was known as clientelism. Clientelism used family, marriage, and friendship to create economic and political power. *Caudillos* often switched between the philosophies of centralism and federalism to gain and maintain power.<sup>117</sup>

### A Troubled Start

The first president under the Constitution of 1824 was Guadalupe Victoria. He had a hard

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time dealing with the *caudillos*, especially Santa Anna.<sup>118</sup> In fact, his own Vice President tried to overthrow him, even though the attempt was unsuccessful. When it came time for the second election, Santa Anna and others did not like the results and made **Vicente Guerrero**, a *caudillo*, the next president.<sup>119</sup>

Just as Guerrero took office in 1829, Spain attempted to recapture its colony. The Spanish invaders were defeated by Santa Anna. After the failed attempt at re-conquest, many Spaniards left Mexico. They felt like they would be blamed and targeted for the attempted re-conquest. Because these Spaniards were wealthy, when they left, a lot of money and other resources also left Mexico. Thus, Spanish investors were replaced by British, French, and German merchants. This made Mexico extremely dependent on European powers.<sup>120</sup> Foreign dependence would not benefit Mexico and would be a problem for the Mexican nation for many years.

Furthermore, under the new constitution the president could act like a dictator in times of emergency. Guerrero viewed Spain's attempted re-colonization of Mexico as an emergency. When the Spanish were defeated, Guerrero refused to give up his power. Guerrero's own vice president staged yet another coup and was successful. Guerrero tried to escape the country unsuccessfully and was eventually captured. Found guilty of treason, he too died at the hands of a firing squad, just like Hidalgo, Morelos, and Iturbide.<sup>121</sup> Mexico now turned to Santa Anna for leadership.

### Santa Anna

**Santa Anna** was born in 1794. He was a *criollo* and joined the army at the age of 16. When Iturbide switched sides in the fight for independence, Santa Anna followed Iturbide's lead and switched sides as well. Ironically, he would be one of many who helped to overthrow Iturbide.<sup>122</sup>

Between 1821-1850 Mexico had 50 changes in its government. Eleven of those times involved Santa Anna surrendering or retaking power.<sup>123</sup> During these years, the average term in office for a president was only seven and half months.<sup>124</sup> Santa Anna, like most *caudillos*, switched back and forth in his political beliefs. Up until 1834, Santa Anna was

described as a federalist. After 1834, he was a centralist.<sup>125</sup> Santa Anna played such an important part in Mexican history that it was said that "...post-independence Mexican political history was the history of Santa Anna's revolutions."<sup>126</sup>

As president eleven different times, he got bored with the daily affairs of running the country and went home and left the ruling of Mexico to his vice president.<sup>127</sup> He made everyone call him "His Most Serene Highness."<sup>128</sup> More often than not, he portrayed himself as the protector of Mexico as he attempted to repel the Spanish, the French, and the Americans.<sup>129</sup> He even lost his leg fighting against the French in what became known as the "Pastry War."<sup>130</sup>

### Section 3 Review:

1. Define the following terms: republican, centralist, federalist, centralism, federalism, compromise, executive, judicial, legislative, congress, clientelism.
2. Compare and contrast the U.S. Constitution with the Mexican Constitution of 1824.
3. Why was Mexico so politically unstable between the years of 1821-1850?