

# Mexican Independence & War with the United States: Hidalgo, Santa Anna and War

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## 1808

[Napoleon Bonaparte](#) occupies Spain, deposes the monarchy, and installs his brother, Joseph, as head of state. The ensuing Peninsular War between Spain (backed by Britain) and France will lead almost directly to the Mexican war for independence, as the colonial government in New Spain falls into disarray and its opponents begin to gain momentum.

## September 16, 1810

In the midst of factional struggles within the colonial government, Father Manuel [Hidalgo](#), a priest in the small village of Dolores, issues his famous call for Mexican independence. El grito de Dolores set off a flurry of revolutionary action by thousands of natives and mestizos, who banded together to capture [Guanajuato](#) and other major cities west of Mexico City. Despite its initial success, the Hidalgo rebellion loses steam and is defeated quickly, and the priest is captured and killed at [Chihuahua](#) in 1811. His name lives on in the Mexican state of Hidalgo, however, and September 16, 1810, is still celebrated as Mexico's Independence Day.

## 1814

Another priest, Jose [Morelos](#), succeeds Hidalgo as leader of Mexico's independence movement and proclaims a Mexican republic. He is defeated by the royalist forces of the mestizo general Agustín de Iturbide, and the revolutionary banner passes to Vicente [Guerrero](#).

## 1821

After revolt in Spain ushers in a new era of liberal reforms there, conservative Mexican leaders begin plans to end the viceregal system and separate their country from the mother land on their own terms. On their behalf, Iturbide meets with Guerrero and issues the Plan of Iguala, by which Mexico would become an independent country ruled as a limited monarchy, with the Roman Catholic Church as the official state church and equal rights and upper-class status for the Spanish and mestizo populations, as opposed to the majority of the population, which was of Native American or African descent, or mulato (mixed). In August 1821, the last Spanish viceroy is forced to sign the Treaty of Córdoba, marking the official beginning of Mexican independence.

## 1823

Iturbide, who earlier declared himself emperor of the new Mexican state, is deposed by his former aide, General Antonio López de Santa Anna, who declares a Mexican republic. Guadalupe Victoria becomes Mexico's first elected president, and during his tenure

Iturbide is executed, and a bitter struggle begins between Centralist, or conservative, and Federalist, or liberal, elements of the Mexican government that will continue for the next several decades.

### **1833**

Santa Anna himself becomes president after leading the successful resistance against Spain's attempt to recapture Mexico in 1829. His strong Centralist policies encourage the increasing ire of residents of [Texas](#), then still part of Mexico, who declare their independence in 1836. After attempting to quell the rebellion in Texas, Santa Anna's forces are decisively defeated by those of rebel leader [Sam Houston](#) at the [Battle of San Jacinto](#) in April 1836. Humbled, he is forced to resign power by 1844.

### **May 12, 1846**

As a result of the continuing dispute over Texas, frictions between the U.S. and Mexican residents of the region, and a desire to acquire land in [New Mexico](#) and [California](#), the U.S. declares war on Mexico. The U.S. quickly smother their enemy with superior force, launching an invasion of northern Mexico led by General [Zachary Taylor](#) while simultaneously invading New Mexico and California and blockading both of Mexico's coasts. Despite a series of U.S. victories (including a hard-won victory over Santa Anna's men at Buena Vista in February 1847) and the success of the blockade, Mexico refuses to admit defeat, and in the spring of 1847 the U.S. sends forces under General [Winfield Scott](#) to capture Mexico City. Scott's men accomplish this on September 14, and a formal peace is reached in the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#), signed on February 2, 1848. By its terms, the Rio Grande becomes the southern boundary of Texas, and California and New Mexico are ceded to the U.S. The U.S. agrees to pay \$15 million as compensation for the seized land, which amounts to half of Mexico's territory.

### **1857**

Defeat in the war against the United States serves as a catalyst for a new era of reform in Mexico. Regional resistance to the strict centralized regime of the aging Santa Anna leads to guerrilla warfare and eventually to the general's forced exile and the rise to power of rebel leader Juan Álvarez. He and his liberal cabinet, including Benito Juárez, institute a series of reforms, culminating in 1857 in the form of a new constitution establishing a federal as opposed to centralized form of government and guaranteeing freedom of speech and universal male suffrage, among other civil liberties. Other reforms focus on curtailing the power and wealth of the Catholic Church. Conservative groups bitterly oppose the new constitution, and in 1858 a three-year-long civil war begins that will devastate an already weakened Mexico.