



It all started with the “Cry of Dolores” - or, in Spanish, the *Grito de Dolores* - when a priest called Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla decided Mexico should be free of Spanish control.

How did the start of Mexico’s war of independence get its name? The priest read his declaration in the town of Dolores on the 16th of September, 1810. Beyond Spain giving up its colonial hold on Mexico, Father Hidalgo demanded racial equality and redistribution of Mexican land. Among his words of action were these:

*My Children, a new dispensation comes to us today...Will you free yourselves? Will you recover the lands stolen 300 years ago from your forefathers by the hated Spaniards? We must act at once.*

It would not be easy to eject Spain from Mexico, since that European power had ruled its colonial territory for around 300 years. Still ... America had declared its independence from Britain, another colonial power, and France had deposed its 300-year House of Bourbon, so ... why not Mexico?

Father Hidalgo's message struck a chord with the indigenous people. They flocked to join his efforts. Before long, a peasant army was marching to Mexico City.

Known as the “Father of Mexican Independence,” Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla actually came closer to achieving his dream than one might imagine. Although his “army” consisted of peasants, they - and their populist ideas - nearly captured Mexico City.

Spain would not give up that easily, however, and Father Hidalgo was defeated at Calderón in January of 1811. Although he fled north, he was captured - then executed - by Spanish forces.

By 1820, Mexicans who were of Spanish descent saw a significant possibility for change when a new government took-over in Spain. Promising reforms, to hold-down the fervor of Mexico’s revolutionaries, the government was met with a rather unexpected demand by those Spanish-Mexican conservatives. They wanted independence, too.

Why would Spanish people, living in Mexico, want independence? Because these Spanish-Mexicans believed independence would help them to maintain their privileged status in Mexican society.

During early 1821, Spanish and Mexican leaders negotiated a plan for Mexico’s independence. Known as the Plan of Iguala, it provided for:

- Mexico to be an independent constitutional monarchy
- The Catholic Church to maintain its privileged position
- Mexicans, of Spanish descent, to be equal to Spaniards
- Mexicans of mixed-blood, or pure Indian blood, to have fewer rights than Spanish-Mexicans.

People who opposed independence - and who were willing to fight against it - were known as “Royalists.” They were soon defeated, however, and the Spanish viceroy was forced to recognize there was nothing more he could do without troops, money and provisions.

By the 24th of August, 1821, the Spanish Viceroy - Juan de O’Donojú - had little choice. He signed the Treaty of

Córdoba, creating an independent Mexico which would be a constitutional monarchy.

However ... the plan for a constitutional monarchy was short-lived because there was no one available who could serve as Mexico's monarch.

So ... Agustín de Iturbide, who had negotiated the plan of independence on behalf of Mexico, became the "Emperor of Mexico."

But ... that plan was short-lived, too, because what independence-minded Mexicans really wanted was their own Republic.

In 1823, Guadalupe Victoria (a republican leader) and Santa Anna (a general of "Alamo" fame) deposed Iturbide, ending Mexico's days as an Empire. They set-up a republic, instead, with Guadalupe Victoria as the new nation's first president.

Mexico has remained a Republic ever since and annually celebrates its Independence on September 16.

Juan O'Gorman (1905-1982) created this mural, depicting the "Cry of Dolores," between 1960-1961. It is maintained at the Museo Nacional de Historia (the National Museum of History), Chapultepec Palace (the imperial palace) in Mexico City.

Click on the image for a better view.

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Image of mural, by Juan O'Gorman, depicting the "Cry of Dolores." Online via Mexico's National Museum of History, located in Mexico City.

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