

Independence in Latin American (HOLT)

Early Struggles in Latin America

By the early 1800s growing tensions among the different ethnic and social groups of Latin American society, as well as reforms imposed by colonial authorities in Europe, were leading to demands for change. The Enlightenment and the American and French Revolutions also inspired some in Latin America to seek greater freedom. Soon new nations began to emerge from colonial domination throughout Latin America.

Haiti Becomes Independent The first Latin American territory to break its ties with Europe was Saint Domingue, located on the western half of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola. Sugar exports had made Saint Domingue one of France's richest possessions. But this prosperity was built on slave labor. The French Revolution had had a dramatic effect on Saint Domingue. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen gave the right to vote to all free men, including mulattoes, people of mixed African and European ancestry. French settlers on Saint Domingue, however, resisted the new law. As tensions rose, **Toussaint L'Ouverture**, a former enslaved African, led a group of mulattoes and slaves in a bloody revolt against the French settlers.

Toussaint's military and political actions made him a hero in Hispaniola. Back in France, the emperor Napoleon was worried. Napoleon sent a French general to Hispaniola to take control of the colony away from Toussaint. The island forces struggled for months, but in 1802 Toussaint agreed to an armistice. The French broke the agreement and sent him to prison in France, where he died in 1803. Still the fight for independence continued. In 1804 the revolutionaries of Saint Domingue declared their independence from France and named their new nation Haiti.

Colonies of Spain and Portugal At the same time, another kind of independence movement was beginning to form in the colonies of Spain and Portugal. In the 1800s, Spain controlled most of Latin America, including what is today Mexico and a large portion of Central and South America. Portugal governed the huge colony of Brazil.

In the 1700s Spanish kings had made improvements in their colonies, building roads and regulating trade. As a result, the colonies grew in wealth and prosperity. This wealth gave some in Latin America greater access to education and new ideas. As a result, educated colonists read the works of Enlightenment philosophers and learned about revolutions in France and America. One scholar named Antonio Nariño translated the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen into Spanish.

At the same time, tensions were growing between two groups in Latin America: **creoles** (KREE-ohlz), people of European descent who were born in the colonies, and **peninsulares** (peh-need-soo-LAHR-ayz), colonists who were born in Spain. A similar distinction was made between Brazilian-born and Portuguese-born colonists. Creoles were excluded from the highest-level government or church positions, which were reserved for *peninsulares*. Together, creoles and *peninsulares* made up the highest social class; lower on the social scale were people of mixed race, Africans, and Indians.



As their prosperity grew, creoles began to resent the *peninsulares*. Creoles also resented their faraway Spanish rulers. One bishop said that if the Creoles “could empty their veins of the Spanish part of their blood, they would gladly do so.”

In 1807 the French emperor Napoleon invaded Spain and Portugal. The king of Spain went to prison and the king of Portugal fled to Brazil. This invasion seriously weakened the power of Spain and Portugal in Latin America. Some creole revolutionaries decided the time was right to fight for independence.

Sequence How did Haiti win independence from France?

Independence in Mexico

Napoleon’s conquest of Spain was the spark for independence in the colony of New Spain, as Mexico was known at the time. Mexico was a Spanish colony with a mixture of creoles, *peninsulares*, Indians, and people of mixed race.

Father Hidalgo In 1810 in a small town in southern Mexico, a creole priest named Father **Miguel Hidalgo** (mee-GEHL ee-DAHL-goh) made the first public call for Mexican independence.

Hidalgo had a history of challenging authority. He had been investigated by Spanish authorities for leading discussions of literature and art in his home. Hidalgo invited many people to these discussions, including creoles, *peninsulares*, Indians and people of mixed race. Eventually he met creoles who wanted to take power from the *peninsulares*. Hidalgo became a leader and helped to plan a rebellion.

On September 16, 1810, Hidalgo rang a bell in his home town, calling the members of his church to the churchyard. There he delivered a famous speech calling on peasants to fight for their independence against the Spanish *peninsulares* in Mexico. He shouted, “Death to bad government and death to Spaniards!”

Hidalgo was calling for the peasants to revolt against the *peninsulares*, not against Spain. In fact, in his speech he said he was loyal to the Spanish king. But the Spanish authorities realized Hidalgo was behind the growing revolution. He was captured and executed, but the Mexican independence movement had begun. Hidalgo would later become known as the Father of Mexican Independence.

Morelos Continues the Revolution

After the death of Hidalgo, another creole priest, **José María Morelos**, became the leader of the revolutionary movement. He organized a Mexican congress with representatives from many places in Mexico. Morelos wanted all people born in Mexico, whether they were Indian, mixed race, or creole, to be called Americans. He also wanted Mexico to be an independent republic with guaranteed freedoms. Morelos was a strong military leader. He led troops and took control of parts of Mexico for the independence movement. But eventually he too was captured. The Spanish authorities found him guilty of treason and executed him.

A Creole King for Mexico Not all creoles in Mexico wanted independence from Spain. Some remained royalists, people who were loyal to the Spanish king. One of these creole royalists was a military officer named Agustín de Iturbide (ah-goos-TEEN day ee-toor-BEE-day). In 1820 the Spanish authorities asked Iturbide to lead a final battle against the revolutionaries. They believed he could end the Mexican independence movement for good. However, that same year a liberal revolution was underway in Spain. Iturbide believed this revolution might take away some of his power, so he decided to switch sides and fight for the Mexican revolutionaries.

Iturbide made a three-part proposal to the leader of the revolution. First, Mexico would gain its independence but would be ruled by a monarch. Second, creoles and *peninsulares* would have equal rights. Third, the Roman Catholic Church would be the official church of Mexico. This independence proposal was very different from

the ideas of Hidalgo and Morelos. But after 10 years of fighting, the compromise brought together many different groups, including the creoles and the *peninsulares* and the revolutionaries and the royalists. Both royalist and rebel troops joined Iturbide to win independence from Spain.

In 1821 Mexico declared its independence from Spain. That same year Mexico named as its emperor the creole military leader who had made independence happen. Iturbide became Emperor Agustín I of Mexico.

Compare and Contrast

How were the goals of Hidalgo, Morelos, and Iturbide different, and how were they similar?

ACES OF HISTORY Two Revolutionary Leaders

 <p>Simón BOLÍVAR 1783–1830</p>	 <p>José de SAN MARTÍN 1778–1850</p>
<p>Known as the “George Washington of South America,” Simón Bolívar was a revolutionary general. In the early 1800s he liberated several South American colonies from Spanish rule.</p> <p>Beginning in 1811 Bolívar helped free his native Venezuela. He was president of Gran Colombia (present-day Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, and Ecuador) and then Peru. Because Bolívar also helped free Bolivia, the country was named in his honor. Today Bolívar’s birthday is a national holiday in both Venezuela and Bolivia.</p> <p>Summarize What were Bolívar’s accomplishments?</p>	<p>José de San Martín was the son of a royal official in the colony of La Plata, which later became Argentina. San Martín was the main leader against Spanish rule in southern South America. By 1821 he had liberated not only La Plata but also Chile and much of Peru. As Spanish resistance continued, San Martín helped fellow revolutionaries such as Simón Bolívar.</p> <p>San Martín is perhaps best known for skillfully leading his troops into Chile through the difficult terrain of the Andes Mountains. There, he defeated royalist troops and liberated Chile.</p> <p>Analyze How did San Martín liberate Chile?</p>
<p>Draw Conclusions What impact did the accomplishments of Bolívar and San Martín have on Latin America?</p>	

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Revolutionary Leaders in South America

The revolutions in Haiti and Mexico, as well as earlier revolutions in the United States and France, inspired leaders in South America. Soon, independence movements began to form in these colonies, and several capable revolutionary leaders emerged.

Simón Bolívar The most influential leader in the South American independence movement was **Simón Bolívar** (see-MOHN boh-LEE- vahr). He is known as simply “the Liberator” because of his key role in liberating Spain’s colonies in South America.

Bolívar was born into a wealthy creole family in what is now Venezuela. He often traveled to Europe and was an admirer of Napoleon’s leadership. Once, while in Rome, he made a famous pledge to liberate South America. In 1811 Venezuela declared independence from Spain. For the next 10 years, Bolívar led a series of military campaigns against Spanish forces. Finally, in 1821, Bolívar’s troops had defeated the Spanish in most of northern South America.

Bolívar had a dream for the newly independent South America. He wanted to form one large, united country called the Federation of the Andes. That dream, however, never became reality. Bolívar did set up the state of Gran Colombia, which included what are now Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, and Ecuador. But other leaders set up separate countries in Peru, Bolivia, and other places. “America is ungovernable,” Bolívar complained.

José de San Martín While Simón Bolívar was fighting for independence in the north, **José de San Martín** was fighting for independence from Spain in the south. San Martín was a soldier who had fought against Napoleon in Spain. Born in Argentina, he returned home when he learned that his country was rising up against Spanish rule. Eventually, San Martín would lead the independence movement not only in Argentina, but in most of southern South America.

After declaring independence for Argentina in 1816, San Martín moved on to Chile. There he helped lead troops over a 15,000-foot summit in the Andes Mountains. The feat helped his forces surprise the Spanish troops and win independence for Chile.

Next San Martín moved on to Gran Colombia. There he met the northern revolutionary leader Simón Bolívar. Historians do not agree on what the two men discussed when they met. What is known is that San Martín resigned his position after the meeting. This left Bolívar in power. San Martín returned to Europe, where he lived until his death in 1850.

Pedro I The story of independence was a bit different in the Portuguese colony of Brazil. When Napoleon invaded Portugal in 1807, the reigning Portuguese monarch John VI and his family fled. They took a long journey to their colony in Brazil, where they lived for more than 10 years. Having the Portuguese monarch in Brazil raised the status of the colony. John VI named the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro as the capital of the entire Portuguese empire. He also allowed Brazil to trade directly with the rest of the world, rather than through Portugal.

After a revolution in Portugal in 1820, John VI returned to Portugal. He left his son Pedro to rule Brazil. Then, at about the time that Bolívar and San Martín were liberating the rest of South America, Brazilian-born colonists began to protest their colonial status. Brazil wanted independence too. But the transition to independence happened more smoothly in Brazil than anywhere else in Latin America. In September 1822, Prince Pedro simply declared Brazil independent. Soon afterward, he was crowned Emperor **Pedro I** of Brazil. Brazil had achieved independence with very little violence.

Contrast In what ways was the independence movement in Brazil different from independence movements elsewhere in South America?

PRIMARY SOURCES

Bolívar’s Message to the Congress of Angostura

In 1819 Simón Bolívar wrote to members of Congress in the city of Angostura asking for the abolition of slavery.

“Americans by birth and Europeans by law, we find ourselves engaged in a dual conflict: we are disputing with the natives for title of ownership, and at the same time we are struggling to maintain ourselves in the country that gave us birth against the opposition of the invaders . . . As our role has always been strictly passive and political existence nil, we find our quest for liberty is now even more difficult to achieve; for we, having been placed in a state lower than slavery, had been robbed not only of our freedom but also of the right to exercise an active domestic tyranny.”

Skills Focus

READING LIKE A HISTORIAN

Draw Conclusions Who is Bolívar referring to when he mentions the “invaders”?

See **Skills Handbook**, p. H25