

1804 Haiti proclaims its independence.

1819 Simón Bolívar defeats Spaniards at the Battle of Boyacá.

1825 Portugal recognizes Brazil's independence.

Section 5

Latin American Independence

Guide to Reading

Read to Find Out

Main Idea The countries of Latin America won independence in a variety of ways.

► Terms to Define

peninsulares, creoles, mestizos

► People to Meet

François Toussaint-Louverture, Miguel Hidalgo, Simón Bolívar, José de San Martín, Pedro I

► Places to Locate

Haiti, Mexico, Central America, Venezuela, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Brazil

The Storyteller

Simón Bolívar sent a joyous letter to a fellow general on January 8, 1822, displaying his belief in a unified America. He wrote, "America's greatest day has not yet dawned. We have indeed driven out our oppressors, smashed the tablets of their

tyrannical laws, and established legitimate institutions; but we have yet to lay the foundation ... that will make of this part of the world a nation of republics." Bolívar was confident that this unified America would impress Europe: "Who shall oppose an America united in heart, subject to one law, and guided by the torch of liberty?"

—adapted from *Selected Writings of Bolívar*, compiled by Vicente Lecuna and edited by Harold A. Bierck, Jr., 1951



Simón Bolívar

For 300 years Spain and Portugal held colonies in the Americas without facing serious threats to their rule. In the early 1800s, however, the situation changed. Inspired by the American and French Revolutions, Latin Americans sought an end to colonial rule and joined independence movements.

Ruling the Colonies

Like other European nations, Spain and Portugal regarded their Latin American colonies with a mercantilist view—the idea that colonies existed chiefly to increase the home countries' wealth. Mexico, Peru, and Brazil contained large deposits of gold and silver as well as forests that yielded valuable exotic woods such as mahogany and ebony.

Farming provided another major source of colonial income. Spanish and Portuguese monarchs granted huge tracts of fertile land to explorers and nobles for the growing of cash crops, such as corn, sugar, and cocoa. The landowners then forced the Native Americans to work the farms. When they died from forced labor and diseases that the Europeans had introduced to the Americas, the Spanish and the Portuguese imported large numbers of enslaved Africans.

The Catholic Church also played a critical role in the colonial economies, strengthening Spanish and Portuguese rule in Latin America. Both the Spaniards and the Portuguese brought the Catholic religion with them to the Americas. Priests and monks converted the Native Americans who worked on the farms to Catholicism and taught them loyalty to the Crown.

The colonial governments and the clergy worked very closely together. Clergymen held high

government offices. The government, in turn, supported the Church. By 1800 the Catholic Church controlled almost half the wealth of Latin America.

Over the years, colonists became increasingly unhappy with colonial rule. They resented the trade restrictions and high taxes Spain and Portugal imposed upon them. Most of all, they resented the rigid colonial social structure.

A Rigid Social Order

Social classes based on privilege divided colonial Latin America. Colonial leaders, called *peninsulares*, were born in Spain or Portugal and stood at the top level of the social order. Appointed by the Spanish and Portuguese governments, the *peninsulares* held all important military and political positions. Below them were the colonial-born white aristocrats, called *creoles*. Although they controlled most of the land and business in the colonies, the *creoles* were regarded as second-class citizens by the *peninsulares*. The *creoles* envied the privileged leadership positions that were held exclusively by the *peninsulares*.

At the bottom of the colonial social pyramid were the majority of Latin Americans. Some were Native Americans. Others were of African or African and European ancestry. The largest of this group, however, were *mestizos* (meh•STEE•zohz), Latin Americans of mixed Native American and European ancestry. Spurned by the ruling white classes, these Latin Americans faced social and racial barriers in colonial society. They worked as servants for *peninsulares* and *creoles*, and as unskilled laborers and carpenters. Some worked as plantation overseers and farmhands.

Growing Discontent

In the 1800s Latin Americans began to challenge the rigid social order and its controls with revolts throughout Latin America. The *creoles* played the largest leadership roles in these conflicts. Wealthy and well educated, many were well versed in the liberal political philosophies of the Enlightenment, but their colonial birth prevented them from holding the highest government positions. The *creoles* were eager to take control of Latin American affairs.

Uprising in Haiti

Although the Spanish and Portuguese colonies were ripe for revolt, the first successful uprising in the Latin American colonies took place in the French colony of **Haiti** (Saint Domingue), on the island of



Hispaniola in the Caribbean Sea. Huge plantations of sugar, cotton, and coffee spread across the mountains and valleys of the lush tropical land. France and many other countries depended on the tiny colony for their supply of sugar and coffee.

The plantations were owned by French planters and worked by the colony's enslaved African population. More than 500,000 of the 560,000 people living in Haiti in the late 1700s were enslaved or had been. The few French planters who controlled the French colony often went to severe and brutal extremes to control the African majority.

Unrest erupted in the early 1790s when enslaved Africans led by a formerly enslaved man named **François Toussaint-Louverture** (TOO•SAN LOO•vuh•TYUR) revolted, setting fire to plantation homes and fields of sugarcane. One observer described the horrifying scene:

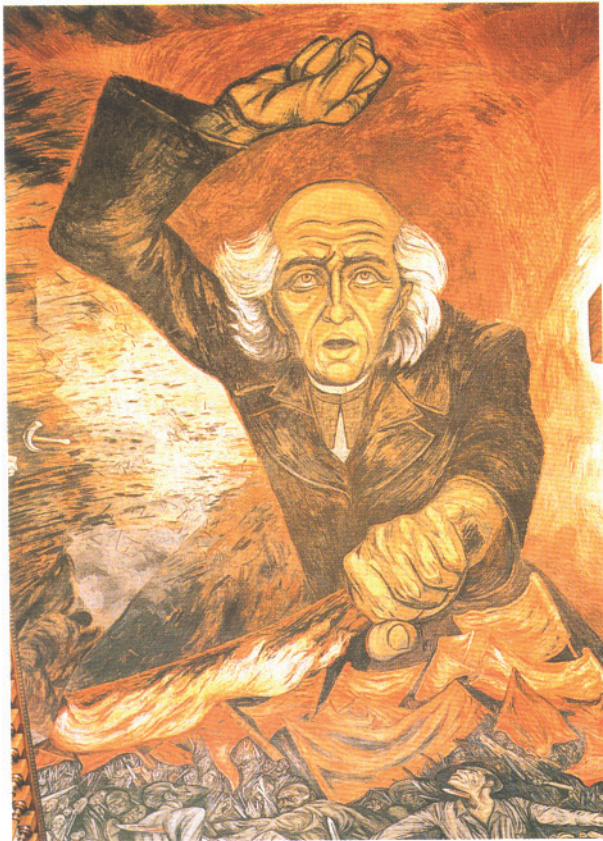
“Picture to yourself the whole horizon a wall of fire, from which continually rose thick vortices [whirling columns] of smoke, whose huge black volumes could be likened only to those frightful storm-clouds ... for nearly three weeks we could

barely distinguish between day and night, for so long as the rebels found anything to feed the flames, they never ceased to burn.... ”

In 1802 Napoleon sent forces to take control of the colony. Captured by French officers, Toussaint-Louverture was imprisoned in France, where he died in 1803. Then a wave of yellow fever aided the revolutionaries. The epidemic swept across the colony, killing thousands of French soldiers. The rebel army defeated the French, and in 1804 Haiti proclaimed its independence.

Mexico Struggles for Freedom

One of the earliest uprisings against Spanish rule occurred in **Mexico**, which at that time was part of New Spain. In 1810 a Catholic priest named **Miguel Hidalgo** led the fight against the Spanish government in Mexico. Hidalgo cared deeply for



History & Art

Father Miguel Hidalgo, a fresco by José Clemente Orozco, 1937. Governor's Mansion, Guadalajara, Mexico What two groups made up the rebel force that Hidalgo led against the Spanish army?

the poverty-stricken Native Americans and mestizos in his parish of Dolores. In addition to political freedom, he also wanted to end slavery and to improve living conditions for Mexico's poor. To Hidalgo, revolt was the only way to bring change to Mexico.

On September 16, 1810, Hidalgo gave a stirring address that became known as "el Grito de Dolores"—the cry of Dolores. In the speech, he called on Mexicans to fight for "Independence and Liberty." Hidalgo then led Native Americans and mestizos on a freedom march to Mexico City that eventually turned into an armed movement. In spite of early advances, Hidalgo and his forces faced mounting opposition from the Spaniards and their Mexican creole allies. In 1811 the well-trained Spanish army finally overwhelmed the rebels, and Hidalgo was captured and executed.

Another priest, José María Morelos, took charge of the revolution after Hidalgo died. Morelos captured a large portion of southern Mexico. In 1813 he called a conference that declared Mexico's independence from Spain. Morelos's forces fought the Spaniards but were defeated in 1815. Like Hidalgo, Morelos was executed.

Despite many battles, Mexico did not gain full independence until 1821. That year, a liberal revolt in Spain threatened to overthrow the monarchy and establish a constitution. This reform frightened wealthy Mexican creoles, who feared such a change might infringe on their own privileges. To make sure this did not happen, they declared independence from Spain in 1821.

Ironically, their leader was Agustín de Iturbide (EE•TUR•BEE•thay), the army officer who had crushed Morelos's movement. Iturbide made himself emperor in 1822, but opposition to his oppressive rule developed. The Mexican people soon deposed Iturbide and declared their country a republic in 1823.

When Mexico became a republic, the Central American provinces in New Spain declared their independence. In Guatemala, representatives established the United Provinces of **Central America**. In the 1830s leaders divided the region into the countries of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

Spanish South America

Creoles in the Spanish colonies of South America gained an opportunity for independence in 1808 when Napoleon seized control of the Spanish government. The refusal of the Spanish

American colonists to acknowledge Napoleon's government resulted in revolts throughout the empire. In addition, Spain's fight against France, together with the colonies' isolation from their home country, left the Spanish weak and vulnerable to attack. Three outstanding leaders—Simón Bolívar, José de San Martín, and Bernardo O'Higgins—led South American colonies in their fight against Spanish rule.

Simón Bolívar, a creole from **Venezuela**, led many colonies to independence. Bolívar believed in equality and saw liberty as "the only object worth a man's life." Bolívar had witnessed the reforms of the French Revolution. Called "the Liberator," Bolívar devoted his life to freedom for Latin Americans.

In 1810 Bolívar started a revolt against the Spaniards in Caracas. After nearly 9 years of fighting, Bolívar crushed Spain's power in northern South America at the Battle of Boyacá in 1819. During the next 20 years, Bolívar and his forces won freedom for the present-day countries of Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Bolivia, and Ecuador.

While Bolívar fought in Venezuela, another revolutionary leader, **José de San Martín** of **Argentina**, led Latin American armies over the Andes Mountains and into **Chile**. In Chile, San Martín joined Bernardo O'Higgins. Together, their forces successfully achieved independence for Chile in 1818. San Martín then set off to free **Peru** in 1820. Within a year he captured Lima and declared Peru independent.

In July 1822 San Martín and Bolívar met in the Ecuadorian port of Guayaquil (GWY•uh•KEEL) to discuss the future of Latin America. Though they shared a common goal, they could not agree on strategy and policy. San Martín finally decided to withdraw from the revolt and allowed Bolívar to take command. By 1826 Bolívar and his armies had liberated all of South America.

Brazil Gains Independence

Brazil achieved its independence without the bloodshed that accompanied the liberation of Spanish America. In 1808 Napoleon's French army had invaded Portugal, causing the Portuguese royal family to flee to Brazil.

King João transferred his monarchy to Brazil, declaring Rio de Janeiro capital of the Portuguese Empire. João immediately introduced governmental reforms in Brazil. He reinstated more favorable trade laws by opening Brazil's ports to the world. João also worked to make the agriculture and



Greeks Fight for Independence

Greece, 1821

Greece's struggle for independence from the Ottoman Turks began in 1821 when Greek fighters gained control of the Peloponnese and many islands in the Aegean Sea. But in 1825, a combined army of Turks and Egyptians regained these regions. France, Great Britain, and Russia came to Greece's aid in 1827 and defeated the Turkish-Egyptian fleet in the Battle of Navarino. By 1829 both the Turks and the Egyptians left Greece, and Greece became independent that year.



mining industries more profitable. Soon both industry and commerce were flourishing.

The liberal ruler brought Brazilians increasing opportunities by funding public education, including military academies, an art school, and medical schools. With these reforms Brazil moved quickly toward independence, and in 1815 João made Brazil a self-governing kingdom within the Portuguese Empire.

King João came to love the semitropical land of mountains and endless forests; he chose to remain there after Napoleon was defeated in 1815. In 1820, however, liberals took over the Portuguese government. Determined to save his throne, he returned to Portugal. He left Brazil in the hands of his 23-year-old son, Dom Pedro.

The new Portuguese government fought to make Brazil a colonial possession again. Leaders ended free trade and many of the other advantages Brazil had enjoyed under João's monarchy. They also demanded that Dom Pedro abandon his rule and immediately return to Portugal. Supported by his father, Dom Pedro declared that he would remain in Brazil. Dom Pedro defied Portuguese leaders by calling a constitutional convention and answered their angry response with a cry of "Independence or death!"

In September 1822 Brazil won full independence from Portugal. Three months later Dom Pedro was

crowned Emperor **Pedro I** of Brazil. With Pedro ruling the empire under a constitution, Brazil became the only independent country in South America to freely choose a constitutional monarchy as its form of government.

Meanwhile, João maintained his support of his beloved Brazil by refusing to allow the Portuguese government to send new military forces to fight the rebels. Great Britain also pressured Portugal to end its battle. In 1825 Portugal finally recognized Brazil's independence.

Challenges to Growth

By the mid-1820s most Latin American countries had won their independence. Their next task was to achieve national unity and a stable government. These goals, however, were difficult to reach. Simón Bolívar, who had dreamed of uniting all of northern South America into one large and powerful state, became so disappointed and disillusioned that he wrote, "Those who have toiled for liberty in South America have plowed the sea."

Common Problems

In trying to build stable and prosperous nations, Latin Americans faced a number of challenges. One obstacle was the geography of Central and South America. High mountains and thick jungles made transportation and communication difficult, hindering trade and economic growth. Vast areas of fertile land remained undeveloped. Population centers, separated by physical barriers, became rivals instead of allies.

Other problems were part of Latin America's colonial heritage. Spanish and Portuguese rule had given the Latin Americans little practice in governing themselves. Instead, they were used to authoritarian government, which was not responsible to the people and demanded obedience from them.

In the colonial system, political power was in the hands of the executive branch of government. The judicial branch was weak and limited, and the legislative branch was practically nonexistent. Latin Americans had strong, well-educated leaders, but they had no experience in the legislative process. Simón Bolívar complained that the colonial system had kept his people in a state of "permanent childhood" with regard to knowledge of running a government.

Independence did not bring about much change in social conditions in Latin America. Catholicism remained the official religion, and Church and government continued to be closely tied. The new countries also continued to maintain a separation between upper and lower classes. The dominant group was now the creoles instead of the *peninsulares*. Creoles owned the best land and controlled business and government. Their privileged position was resented, especially by the mestizos.

Continuing Political Conflicts

Soon after independence, political conflicts increased. Liberals called for separation of Church and state, the breakup of large estates, higher taxes on land, public social services, and civilian control of the government. Most of the liberals were mestizos, intellectuals, or merchants who wanted free trade. Opposed to this group were the creoles, most of whom were rich landowners, church leaders, and military officers. These conservatives favored strong central government and a powerful Church and army.

The decades that followed the wars for independence saw an ongoing struggle for economic strength and social justice. Although many South American governments were republics in appearance, many actually were military dictatorships. Today, there still remains in many Latin American countries a vast gap between the ruling rich and the underprivileged poor.

SECTION 5 ASSESSMENT

Main Idea

1. Use a diagram like the one below to describe ways in which Latin American countries won independence.



Recall

2. **Define** *peninsulares*, creoles, mestizos.
3. **Identify** François Toussaint-Louverture, Miguel Hidalgo, Simón Bolívar, José de San Martín, Pedro I.

Critical Thinking

4. **Making Comparisons** How did the independence move-

ment in Mexico differ from the independence movement in Brazil?

Understanding Themes

5. **Nationalism** Did the coming of independence from European rule bring social and political advances to many Latin American countries? Why or why not?