

Mexican War of Independence

On September 16, 1810, a Catholic priest in Mexico, **Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla**, issued a declaration to the Mexican people urging them to fight for their independence from Spain. The declaration was called the 'Grito de Dolores.' This phrase means 'Cry from Dolores.' Dolores is the name of the small town where the priest lived. Spain had ruled them for 300 years. The fight for independence took over 10 years, but the Mexicans won.

In August 1521, Hernan Cortes conquered the Aztec Empire in Mexico for Spain with a huge army of men called Conquistadors. The Spanish ruled the native peoples for over 300 years. They also brought with them many diseases not known to the local peoples. Many of these native peoples were struck down by the diseases and died. Whole civilizations were destroyed.

Hernan Cortes was acting upon orders of Charles V of Spain. After the conquest, the territory now known as Mexico was called New Spain. Cortes built a capital city called Ciudad de Mexico at the site of the city of Tenochtitlan which had been destroyed in the fighting and destruction of the native peoples. Men called viceroys were appointed to manage the new territory.

Hernan Cortes had a son with his native translator, a Mayan woman called La Malinche. The son's name was Martin Cortes. He led the first revolt against the Spanish control of Mexico. In the following several hundred years, most rebellions were started by men of Spanish heritage who had been born in Mexico. They considered themselves of a higher class than those descended from the local natives. These locally-born Spanish people were called **criollos**. The criollos ranked below those born in Europe, however. There was a clear caste system in Mexico during that time with fixed levels of society. People like Martin Cortes who were of mixed parentage were called **mestizos**. The mestizos and the descendants of the native peoples lacked many civil and political rights.

Napoleon, Emperor of France, conquered and occupied Spain from 1808 through 1813. Many of Spain's colonies, including Mexico, felt that the time was right for them to try to set themselves free from Spain. Thus, in 1810, the priest, Miguel Hidalgo y Castillo, read his declaration. He was a well-respected priest but held some views different from the traditional Catholic beliefs.

Besides demanding freedom from Spain, the declaration wanted the redistribution of lands in Mexico, and racial equality. Although he was a criollo, a man of Spanish descent born in Mexico, Hidalgo invited mestizos and those descended from native peoples to join him in the fight. These added numbers made a difference in the results of the war.

Hidalgo led the army to every village he came to on the way to Mexico City. The army murdered many people in the villages. Later, Hidalgo regretted the fact that he allowed the army to do this. He was defeated in 1811 at Calderon. Although he could flee, he was captured and executed in Chihuahua. Several other men took over the leadership of the war.

The Mexican War for Independence lasted until 1821. At that time, the Treaty of Cordoba made Mexico a constitutional monarchy under an emperor Agustin de Iturbide. Eighteen months later the emperor was dethroned and the first Mexican Republic began.

Each year, on the evening of September 15 and the following day, September 16, celebrations are held throughout Mexico to remember the victory for their independence from Spain. These celebrations include parades, bullfights, rodeos and traditional dancing.

1) Which of the following was the occupation of Hidalgo y Castillo?

- A: Teacher
- B: Priest
- C: Farmer
- D: Merchant

2) In which of the following years did the Mexican War for Independence begin?

- A: 1810
- B: 1875
- C: 1742
- D: 1801

3) Which of the following conquered Mexico for Spain?

- A: Hidalgo
- B: Martin Cortes
- C: Hernan Cortes
- D: Agustin de Iturbide

4) Which of the following was the king of Spain who sent an army to conquer Mexico?

- A: Philip
- B: Charles
- C: Henry
- D: Francis

5) On the site of which of the following cities was the current Mexico City built?

- A: Chihuahua
- B: Cordoba
- C: Aztec City
- D: Tenochtitlan

6) Which of the following was the name for locally-born Spanish people in Mexico?

- A: Criollos
- B: Mestizos
- C: Natives
- D: Conquistadors