

THE PATRIOTS' WINNING STRATEGY: NATIVISM

After all, it was *not* the exploited majority, as one might have expected, who initiated independence movements. Radical doctrines such as republicanism did not hold much appeal for conservative country people who had received little exposure to such ideas. Moreover, most of the movements' Creole leaders had no interest in helping the masses or making colonial society more egalitarian. Instead, they simply wanted to rule it themselves. Mexican and Peruvian Creoles, particularly, worried about losing control of large populations of indigenous peasants who had shown a fearsome penchant for rebellion. Consequently, Mexican Creoles backed away wide-eyed after a look at Hidalgo's ragged multitude of 1810, and Peruvian Creoles, mindful of Tupac Amaru II, preferred not to risk declaring independence at all. Venezuelan and Argentine Creoles, on the other hand, showed more confidence in their ability to hold the tiger by the tail. To do so, they somehow had to reach out to "the people." The Creoles were just too few to win independence without help from below.

The winning strategy for independence-minded Creoles was *nativism*. Nativism glorified an American identity defined by birthplace, something Creoles shared with the indigenous people, with those of mixed blood, even with the children of African slaves. *Americanos* was the nativist keyword. From Mexico to Brazil to Argentina, patriots defined theirs as the *American* cause, and their enemies as everyone born in Spain or Portugal. Nativism had many



DEATH OF GIRADOT. Bolivar promoted the heroic images of patriot officers like Atanasio Girardot, killed trying to plant the Venezuelan republic's tricolor flag at Bárbara in 1813. Later in the century, independence heroes became prime material for nation-building commemorations like this 1883 painting. *Wikimedia Commons.*

advantages. The name *Americanos* fit easily and comfortably over multihued Spanish American and Brazilian populations, contrasting them with Europeans. And nativism drew on powerful emotions. Resentment is always at the heart of nativist attitudes, resentment of foreigners and foreign influence. Resentment against the idea of colonial inferiority and, more particularly, against resident Spanish and Portuguese, now foreigners in nativist eyes, was widespread in America at all social levels. Finally, nativism linked arms with liberal ideology in an obvious way. "Who should govern? The People! And who are the People? *Americanos*!" No patriot fighters could ignore the rhetorical appeal of nativism, and all used it sooner or later.

For maximum wartime appeal, the definition of *Americanos* had to be as broad as possible. Few revolutionary leaders really wanted to see social equality, however. Most simply wanted popular support to win independence, leaving the social hierarchy more or less intact. As long as that hierarchy remained in place, the Creoles expected to be the leaders of the emerging sovereign nations.