

more ambiguous and troubled.

Mexico's independence movement began much later than that of the United States. This was not because Mexico's creoles (American-born whites) were pleased with their imperial masters: the Spaniards had discriminated against the creoles, restricted their economic activities, and taxed them mercilessly. Rather, the delay was caused principally by their fear of the yawning gulf between the races and classes. Creoles were white, and many lived in considerable comfort. They well understood that the dark-skinned, impoverished masses tended to see little distinction between creoles and Spaniards: as far as those masses were concerned, the two groups looked pretty much alike, and both looked like the people responsible for centuries of oppression and exploitation. A breakdown of order, the creoles understood, might well land them at the mercy of angry mobs bent on vengeance.

In 1808 Napoleon Bonaparte's armies overran Spain, forcing the abdication of the Spanish king and his heir. Spaniards immediately rose in arms against the usurpation, forming a decidedly liberal movement that, in 1812, promulgated a liberal constitution. The Spanish American colonists were forced to choose between recognizing Napoleon's brother, Joseph, as their king; striking out for independence; or taking the more cautious course of forming caretaker governments until the rightful king, Ferdinand VII, could be restored to the Spanish throne. In Mexico the more cautious option was chosen, and Mexico's government fell into the hands of very conservative Spaniards.

On September 16, 1810, a fifty-seven-year-old priest named Miguel Hidalgo launched a rebellion against that government. Unlike many of his fellow creoles, Hidalgo did not doubt the wisdom of mobilizing the impoverished Indians and castas to man his army. He summoned them to the main

square of the small town of Dolores and explicitly exhorted them to exact vengeance against the *gachupines* (an insulting term for Spaniards) for three centuries of humiliation and despoilment.

Unfortunately for the independence movement, the first engagements of Mexico's war of independence appeared to confirm more conservative creoles' worst fears. In the wealthy mining town of Guanajuato, Hidalgo's troops went on a rampage. Several hundred Spaniards were killed in the initial siege, and afterward the rebels indulged themselves in an orgy of looting, pillaging, murder, and mutilation. The scene was repeated about a month later at Guadalajara, though here the rebels increased the horror by decapitating their Spanish prisoners. To the comfortable classes of Mexico, it seemed as if the very sinews of civilization had been sundered. They compared these events to other well-known nightmares of modern times: the sans-culottes of the French revolution flooding the streets of Paris with the blood of aristocrats; the black slaves of Haiti rising up against their masters, the wealthy planters, carrying out brutal massacres and torching plantations. The leading conservative of early nineteenth-century Mexico, Lucas Alamán, who was an eyewitness to the siege of Guanajuato, would write decades later that the rebels' battle cry—"Long live the Virgin of Guadalupe and death to the *gachupines!*"—"after so many years . . . still resounds in my ears with a frightful echo!"

For conservative Mexicans, the lessons of the early course of the independence war were pivotal. First, these events resoundingly confirmed their suspicion that the vast majority of their fellow countrymen were irresponsible and dangerous and that therefore social control must be maintained at all costs; second, in Mexico the ideas that inspired these events—democracy, republicanism, equality, civil liberties—were impractical at best, lethal at worst. These conservatives, having stared into the gaping maw of barbarism, concluded that they

themselves should hold a monopoly on political power. By the 1830s they had adopted a name for themselves: they were the *hombres de bien*—the men of goodness.

Hidalgo was captured and executed in 1811. His successor, a mestizo priest named José María Morelos, was captured and executed in 1815. Other leaders would follow, but the movement became negligible with Morelos's death. When independence did finally come to Mexico, it was largely a reaction *against* the liberal ideas championed by Hidalgo and Morelos.

It was, in fact, an archconservative royalist army officer who consummated independence after he had been fighting ruthlessly against it for a decade. Alarmed by a liberalizing movement in Spain, Brigadier General Agustín de Iturbide issued an invitation to the leader of the surviving rebel forces, General Vicente Guerrero, to join him in declaring Mexico's separation from Spain. On February 24, 1821, Iturbide promulgated his Plan of Iguala, a declaration of independence designed to please a very broad and varied constituency, from reactionary royalists and pious Catholics to liberal firebrands. The plan addressed only those issues on which there was already widespread agreement, or at least issues on which compromise was probable. The first three articles declared that Roman Catholicism was to be Mexico's official and only legal religion; that Mexico was an independent country; and that its government was to be a constitutional monarchy. Those three principles—religion, independence, and monarchy—were known as the Three Guarantees. The plan had nothing but kind words for Spain and Spaniards and the legacy they bequeathed to Mexico. Although Spain would withhold official recognition of Mexican independence for another fifteen years, its representative on the scene, Superior Political Chief Juan O'Donojú, signed a treaty recognizing Mexico's independence on August 24, 1821, and from that point onward independence was an accomplished fact. On September 27 Iturbide and his army made their triumphal entry into Mex-

ico City amid artillery salvos, ringing church bells, fireworks, flower petals, and the *Te Deum* played by several orchestras.

According to the Plan of Iguala, government power was to be exercised for the time being by a junta, or committee, of notable men who would assemble the new congress. Of the thirty-eight men Iturbide named to the Junta, not a single one had fought in or sympathized with the rebel armies, and none advocated republicanism. On September 28 this Junta issued an Act of Independence of the Mexican Empire that was effusive in its praise for Iturbide but said not a word about the eleven-year struggle for independence that had preceded his belated "revolution." Clearly, the men who were now setting themselves up to exercise power in the new nation were not the ones who had fought for independence, and most had in fact been frank enemies of the liberating movement. One would not require extraordinary powers of clairvoyance to see that this simple fact foreshadowed enormous political problems in the offing.

The soldiers who had fought for independence—for the most part, impoverished Indians and castas—were, it seemed, to be shut out of the new nation's ruling class. Worse yet, the high level of provincial independence that had prevailed during the colonial period had been exacerbated by the violent, decade-long independence struggle, and several regions in the new republic were strenuously disinclined to cooperate with any central government. From the outset, calls for federalism—the division of political power among the country's many regions—were strong and insistent. Governing Mexico, then, would require coming to grips with formidable regional, class, and ethnic divisions. It would be a daunting task.

In the United States the generation that secured independence from Britain may have had its disagreements, but those disagreements were not nearly as fundamental as the ones that beset their counterparts in Mexico. Tellingly, during Mexico's first years as an independent republic a full-throated

debate erupted regarding who should properly be recognized as the true author of independence. Should that accolade go to Father Hidalgo and his successor Morelos, who had called for popular government, an end to racism, redistribution of wealth, and judicial reforms—revolutionary changes aiming to resolve the country's severe divisions? Or should it go to Iturbide, who sought to appeal to people on every side of the great social divide, in effect denying the very existence of that divide? In any event, the divisions that Hidalgo and Morelos had sought to heal could not be denied for long. Mexico's internal conflicts would soon render it vulnerable to the expansionist whims of its powerful neighbor to the north.