

HEROES & HERO CULTS IN LATIN AMERICA



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Grievances of citizens throughout the country continued to mount in November and December 1844, when an unusually unified movement rallied against Santa Anna. The uprising represented a rare alliance of distinct social and political groups comprised of rich and poor, traditionalists and moderates. Although the various participants later disagreed regarding Mexico's future, they all concurred that Santa Anna had to go. Many prominent people, including congressmen and the editors of *El siglo XIX*, had already expressed dissatisfaction with his plan to reconquer Texas, arguing that the government did not have the funds to mount such an ambitious campaign. Offended by the exorbitance of his regime, angered by his near-autocratic rule, and outraged at the ever-increasing taxes, the opponents united to remove Santa Anna from office.³¹

Traditionalist general Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga, who had allied with Santa Anna in 1841, rebelled against him on November 2, thereby initiating a series of events that forced the caudillo into exile. Paredes y Arrillaga proclaimed that he would empower Congress with its full constitutional liberties and that Santa Anna must account for the sixty million pesos spent in the last two years. The rebellious general quickly gained the support of other military officers, increasing the pressure on Santa Anna, who led his still loyal troops to Querétaro, where he hoped to win a military victory over his enemy. When interim president Valentín Canalizo tried to close the Congress, many of its members reacted in defiance and claimed that the acting president did not have the authority to dismiss it. They continued to meet despite the decree. Finally, on December 6, soldiers in Mexico City

declared themselves against the government, forcing Canalizo to surrender to their commander, José Joaquín de Herrera, who promised to restore the health of the nation.³²

Citizens rioted in the streets of Mexico City during the aftermath of the December coup, destroying monuments and challenging the notion expressed in Sierra y Rosso's 1842 eulogy that Santa Anna had achieved immortality. An agitated group stormed the cemetery where the caudillo's leg was enshrined. The citizens destroyed the memorial and seized the decayed leg, carrying it through the streets, shouting in their excitement. Unable to lay hands on Santa Anna, they vented their outrage on his lost limb, symbolically inflicting physical injury on the leader himself. Although a soldier eventually stopped the enraged mob and rescued the limb from further disgrace, he could not prevent the crowd from continuing its rampage. It proceeded to the Plaza de Volador, where one of the most hated Santa Anna statues was located. The sculptor had depicted the president pointing north to emphasize his quest to reconquer Texas, but opponents had implied that he was pointing at the national mint, signifying his objective to abscond with government funds. The irate throng attacked the monument to protest the policies that had enriched the president while they suffered. A similar fate befell his statue at the Teatro de Santa Anna. One person even took a fragment of the bust home in an attempt to possess a small part of the wealth to which so few had access. Sierra y Rosso had referred to the temporality of monuments and the immortality of Santa Anna in his funeral oration. He had noted that although statues were always destroyed over time, the honored legacy of the heroic caudillo would persist in Mexico for eternity. But only two years later, in December 1844, an impassioned mob hoped to abolish the memory of the president by demolishing the monuments erected in his honor.³³

Mexicans explained the coup in pamphlets that circulated throughout the city. One such leaflet noted a significant irony regarding the December 6 rebellion. On the same day in 1822, Santa Anna had proclaimed against the imperial government of Iturbide. The pamphleteer reprinted the president's 1822 call for the emperor's removal from power, as well as his assertions that Iturbide had offended honor and justice. The leaflet's author criticized Santa Anna for similar abuses of authority, concluding that on December 6, 1844, Mexicans had simply expressed his 1822 desire to remove an autocrat from office.³⁴