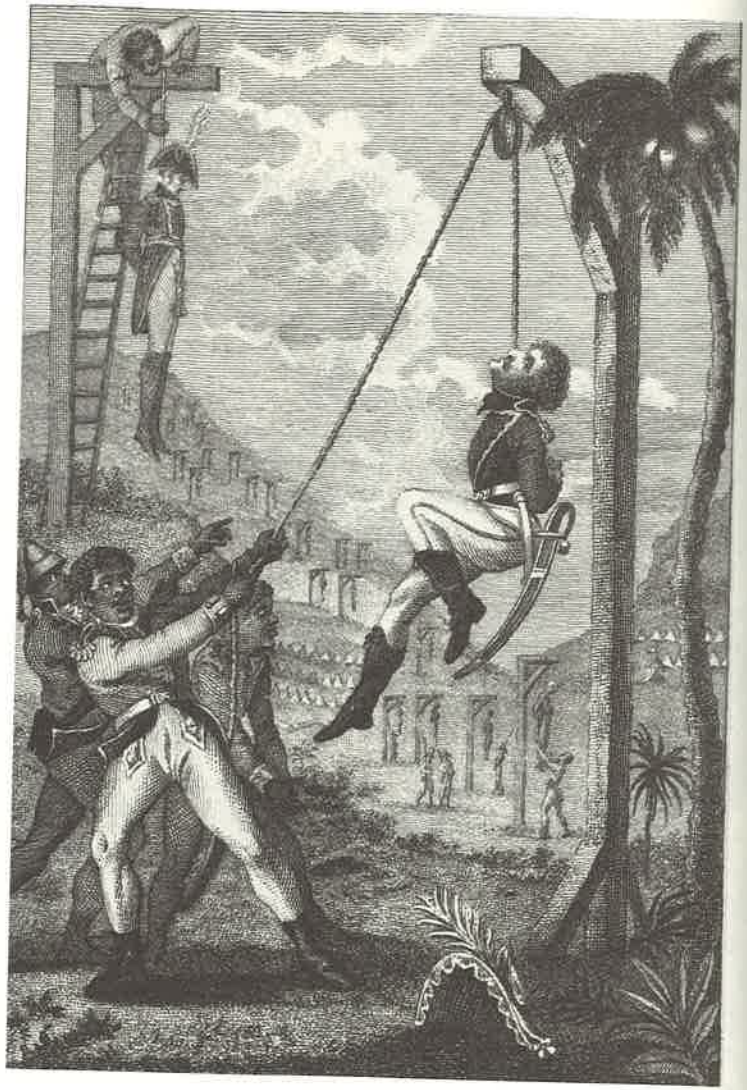
The Liberator Simón Bolívar. Bolívar, who helped create five nations, was the single greatest general of independence. Bolívar was from Caracas, the son of a plantation-owning family who gave him a privileged education—including a European walking tour with his brilliant tutor, Simón Rodríguez, a man afire with new ideas. But white, upper-class generals like Bolívar could not win independence without the support of Latin America's nonwhite majority. Indigenous patriots figure prominently in this Bolivian painting. *Courtesy of Hulton Getty Picture Collection.*

1807–8	1810–14	1815	1820	1824
Napoleon invades Iberia	Spanish American revolts begin	Brazil raised to status of kingdom	Liberal revolutions in Spain and Portugal	Battle of Ayacucho

3. INDEPENDENCE

Latin American struggles for independence erupted suddenly and unexpectedly. There had been a few ominous tremors before 1800, but the most remarkable thing about colonial rule continued to be its overall stability. Therefore, nobody saw an imperial collapse coming, and when it came, everybody improvised. One might expect those at the bottom to rise up when European control slipped; that did happen in some places, notably Haiti, where slaves literally took over. But the outcome in Spanish America and Brazil was more conservative. In general, the white people at the top of the social hierarchy stayed there, while blacks and indigenous people stayed at the bottom. On the other hand, Latin American independence created a dozen of the world's first constitutional republics. The fighting dealt the caste system a deathblow and brought new honor to many people of mixed race.

The fighting itself changed much in Latin America. Many men of color became honored war heroes because of their bravery in combat. But winning the wars of independence required more than blood; it also required a sense of belonging and shared purpose. The modern nations of Latin America did not yet exist, even as a pipe dream, when the wars began. What did an African slave, a Quechua-speaking villager, a landowner of



THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION. The great slave uprising that began in the French colony of Haiti in 1791 crushed the master class, defeated several French armies sent to repress it, and created a vivid worst-case scenario for a generation of Latin American slave owners. *Schomburg Center/Art Resource, New York.*

pure Spanish blood, and a mestizo artisan have in common just because all had been born (for example) in the viceroyalty of Peru? Not much, obviously, aside from being subjects of the Spanish Crown, which treated them almost as different subspecies of human being. So patriot leaders faced a great challenge. They had to imagine new nations and get other people with little in common to imagine those nations, too. The image had to be so vivid that people would betray their king, kill, and risk death for it. The patriotic vision of the wars of independence introduced elements of the two big ideas, liberalism and nationalism, that have animated Latin American political life ever since.

To understand people's actions during the crisis years of 1808–25, to see how independence came so unexpectedly, then so quickly, how it changed so much and yet so little, we must observe how violent events in Europe suddenly destabilized colonial rule. Then we will see how Latin Americans reacted—a story with several different threads. Core areas like Mexico and Peru followed one pattern, fringe areas like Venezuela and Argentina another. Brazil followed its own quite distinctive path to independence. These winding roads can get a bit complicated, but understanding them is worthwhile, because the wars of independence cast a long shadow on the history of Latin America.

REVOLUTION AND WAR IN EUROPE

Spanish Americans experienced a grueling couple of decades after 1788 under the calamitous rule of an incompetent king, Carlos IV, who shirked his royal responsibilities and left governing to a hated minister widely known to be the queen's lover. Misrule had combined with a series of costly wars to bankrupt the Spanish state during the 1700s. The bankruptcy of the Crown led to higher taxes, as well as to other irritating practices like the sale of high office, which put incompetent people in

positions of command, and highly unpopular government foreclosure of long-term loans. Worse, war with England, beginning in 1796 and lasting off and on for the next decade, meant confronting the world's most powerful navy, for these were the years when "Britannia ruled the waves." The Spanish navy was overwhelmed, and the number of Atlantic sailings dropped drastically, strangling colonial trade. Spanish Americans watched all this with dismay but without seeing it as a cue to rebel. After all, foreign wars often evoke feelings of loyalty to king and country, and the English were hereditary enemies who frequently attacked Spanish American ships and ports. Neither Spain nor Portugal could escape the widening repercussions of the French Revolution (1789–99) and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars (1799–1815) that eventually engulfed all of Europe. In practical terms, Spanish American independence began to exist de facto in 1808, when the Spanish king was imprisoned by Napoleon.

In Brazil, things worked out differently. Portugal had maintained a friendly relationship with England since the 1300s, a relationship described in the 1386 Treaty of Windsor as "an inviolable, eternal, solid, perpetual, and true league of friendship"—a relationship that England dominated. England would prove a valuable but demanding ally. But, English ally or no, the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars started the process of independence in Brazil as well.

French revolutionaries of the 1790s had challenged the idea of monarchy based on divine right, even executing the French king and queen, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. These revolutionaries took inspiration from the intellectual awakening called the Enlightenment. They proclaimed "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," questioned traditional authority, and remade the political order. They sneered at idiot kings who, thanks to their royal bloodlines, possessed power they did not deserve. Instead, the revolutionaries argued for *popular sovereignty*,

meaning that the people of each nation (not yet including women, however) had the right to determine who would rule them according to a written constitution. French revolutionaries set out to overthrow other European kings and establish republics. Somewhat perversely, the revolutionary creed became an ideology to justify military aggression, as French armies led by General, then First Consul, and finally Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte began "liberating" other countries into French control. Spain and Portugal were two of these.

The new political ideology of liberty and liberation—liberalism, in a word—was almost as much English as French in origin. England's own Civil War and revolution in the 1600s had enshrined the principle of popular sovereignty in the unwritten English constitution. England preserved its monarchy, as it does to this day, but it is a limited monarchy, subordinate to an elected legislature, the House of Commons, which liberals regarded as the voice of "the people." England opposed the radicalism of the French Revolution and led the fight against Napoleonic expansionism. That aligned England with anti-Napoleonic Spanish and Portuguese patriots during Latin America's independence period, as we will see. In sum, liberalism, whether coming from France or England, inspired all sides in the Napoleonic Wars. It was the impact of those wars, and their aftermath, in turn, that triggered Latin American independence—all under the ideological banner of popular sovereignty.

In late 1807, when the Portuguese refused to close their ports and declare war on their old ally, England, Napoleon invaded Portugal. The Portuguese royal family fled, accompanied by a glittering entourage of nobles and government officials, swarms of servants and courtiers—over ten thousand people, as well as the royal treasury—sailing from Lisbon only days before Napoleon's troops arrived in the Portuguese capital. British warships were on hand to escort the royal flotilla and, most especially,

Prince João (who exercised power in the name of the queen, his demented mother) to Brazil. For more than a decade, João made his court in Rio de Janeiro, safely outside the reach of Napoleon. Meanwhile, both the Spanish king, Carlos IV, and his heir, Prince Fernando, had fallen into Napoleon's hands and, under pressure, both abdicated their claims to the Spanish throne. Napoleon then had his own brother Joseph crowned king of Spain, a move that most Spaniards and Spanish Americans refused to accept.

One aspect of colonial hegemony had been the gradual acceptance of the Spanish and Portuguese monarchs as rightful rulers by almost everyone in the colonies. The Crown had strong *legitimacy*: authority that inspires obedience. By 1810, a startling contrast existed. The Portuguese Crown was closer than ever to Brazil. The Spanish Crown, usurped by a foreigner, was further than ever from Spanish America. Brazilian history shows how much difference the king's presence could make.

João's royal court in Rio de Janeiro had become the political center of the Portuguese-speaking world, and the people of Rio, always fond of glamour, were delighted to have it there. Thousands of rich European courtiers flooded the city, sparking a boom in building and profitable services, from livery stables to hairdressing. The presence of the royal court also favored the Brazilian elite, for the opportunity to speak a few words directly into the king's ear is valuable indeed. The end of colonial trade monopolies favored Brazil as a whole. Before, Brazilian trade had all been channeled to Portugal, but now João allowed Brazilians to trade with everybody (chiefly the British, who had pressed strongly for this trade opening), and imported goods became less expensive. João liked Rio and enjoy placid naps in his botanical garden as ships from Europe and Spanish America brought news of one distant upheaval after another.

Back in Portugal, an anti-Napoleonic patriot uprising began in 1808 soon after João's departure, and fighting in the Iberian peninsula dragged on for years as Portuguese and Spanish guerrillas, supported by British troops, fought hit-and-run actions against the French. In Spanish America, chronic fighting broke out as well. Independence was declared here and there. Meanwhile, Rio bustled and Brazil remained peaceful. Whatever social and economic pressures had built up during the colonial period, whatever rivalries existed between Portuguese and Brazilians, they did not explode now. So content was João in Rio that even after Napoleon met ultimate defeat in the battle of Waterloo (1815), the Portuguese king conspicuously failed to hurry back to Lisbon.

Events in Spanish America between 1808 and 1815 contrasted totally with the picture in Brazil. Spanish Americans were shocked at the eclipse of the legitimate monarchy. The Spanish government had not vanished entirely, because provincial resistance movements in Spain sent representatives to a national resistance committee, called the Central *Junta*. The Central Junta expected Spanish American support, but Spanish Americans had other ideas. The Central Junta had been chosen entirely in Spain. It therefore represented the Spanish people, but not the Spanish *American* people, and they rejected its dictates. In the wake of the Napoleonic takeover of Spain, most Spanish Americans professed fervent loyalty to their legitimate king, Fernando VII, but in so doing, they also rejected the idea that Mexico or Peru or New Granada were colonies. Instead, they reaffirmed the old idea that the Spanish king's throne had two pillars of support: his European kingdoms in Iberia, and his American kingdoms in the New World. They argued that, although loyal to Fernando, the American kingdoms were equal to the European ones and not subservient to them. In other words, paradoxically, the Napoleonic crisis led Spanish American patriots to invoke the principle of popular sovereignty against Spain itself. Soon, they began to form their own juntas to rule locally in Fernando's name. These "caretaker" juntas were often created at an open meeting of the town council, a *cabildo abierto*.

By 1810, the Spanish resistance to the French occupation had been pushed to the southern port city of Cádiz, where it continued to function under British naval protecton. The Spanish liberals who led the resistance now called for a constitution to be written by elected representatives from both Spain and Spanish America. The Constitution of Cádiz was a truly liberal document and, if implemented, would have profoundly altered the Spanish empire. But it was never fully implemented. By the time it was completed, patriot rebels had already raised the cry of anti-Spanish rebellion in Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina, and elsewhere.

THE SPANISH AMERICAN REBELLIONS BEGIN, 1810–15

But who were these patriot rebels? In most cases, the initiatives for independence came from native-born whites, called Creoles to distinguish them from Spaniards born on the Iberian Peninsula. Iberian-born Spaniards were now called Peninsulars or, often, nastier things that do not translate well. We should backtrack a bit to explain what the Creoles were after.

By the late 1700s, Spanish American Creoles had grown quite resentful of the Peninsulars, with whom they competed socially. Spanish birth made Peninsulars the preferred agents of imperial rule. Peninsular Spaniards normally got the best ecclesiastical and government offices, the key positions on boards of trade, and so on, gaining privileged access to wealth and power over their American-born Creole cousins. But this rivalry existed only at the top of Spanish American society. The other three-quarters or four-fifths of the population—people of indigenous, African, or mixed descent—had little at stake in the Creole-versus-Peninsular contest, because the caste system put them out of the competition altogether. Sometimes they disliked the Creoles more than they disliked the Peninsulars, because the Creoles were the masters and overlords who annoyed them in

daily life. Creoles generally owned the land, and much of the Spanish American population lived under the thumb of landowners. In the towns, it was Creoles, not Peninsulars, who feared the social climbing of prosperous people of mixed race and fought to keep them "in their place." In other words, the majority of Spanish Americans had plenty of reason to revolt—but not particularly against the Peninsulars.

Mexican independence shows these dynamics at work. Mexico was by far the Spanish Crown's brightest imperial jewel by the early 1800s, vastly the most profitable colony, and home to four out of ten Spanish Americans. Peninsulars numbered only a fraction of 1 percent, but Creole resentment against them ran high, so the Creole-dominated cabildo of Mexico City seized the 1808 crisis in Spain as a chance to gain ground against their privileged European cousins. Affirming their continued loyalty to the imprisoned Fernando VII, the Creoles convinced the viceroy to call a representative assembly to provide legitimacy while the king was out of the picture. The colony's powerful Peninsulars would have none of it, however. They actually unseated the viceroy to forestall such an assembly. Creole anger smoldered.

Then, in 1810, Spanish America's political upheavals began in earnest. A Creole conspiracy in Mexico's northern mining region sparked a massive rebellion of indigenous and mestizo peasants. The man who let the genie out of the bottle was a Creole priest, Father Miguel Hidalgo. A reader of banned French books who also studied indigenous languages and defied the Catholic rule of sexual abstinence for clergy, Hidalgo was an impulsive nonconformist, and the Inquisition already had a file on him. Informed that the Spanish authorities would soon arrest him for his part in the conspiracy, Hidalgo hurried to his parish church and rang the bell. He then spoke to the gathering crowd using religious language that his audience well understood—not about independence, but about the need to defend Mexico against the Peninsular usurpers of legitimate authority and the

enemies of Fernando VII. Hidalgo presented the rivalry between Creoles and Peninsulars as a unanimous Spanish American revolt against Spain. He spoke of how Spanish conquerors had stolen Indian lands. In point of fact, it was the Creoles, and not the Peninsulars of 1810, who descended from those conquerors. In truth, Hidalgo had more in common with most Peninsulars, his social peers, than with his indigenous parishioners. But his rhetoric constructed a simple dichotomy: Americans versus Europeans. His battle cry was "Long live the Virgin of Guadalupe, and death to the Spaniards!" The appeal worked.

Poor rural people flocked by the thousands to the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe, now a potent symbol of Mexican identity. The throngs included men, women, and children, whole families, burros, and cattle. Their weapons were mostly farming tools rather than firearms. A recent famine in the mining zone had left many humble Mexicans with little to lose. When terrified Peninsulars in the important mining center of Guanajuato saw twenty thousand angry indigenous peasants coming at them, they hurriedly barricaded themselves in the largest, strongest building in town, the massive granary—but to no avail. Peninsulars died by the hundreds in Guanajuato and then all along the route of this rampaging ragtag army. And not only Peninsulars: Creoles died, too. Hidalgo's patriotic rhetoric had theoretically drawn the line between the Peninsulars and everyone else, but Creoles and Peninsulars resembled one another. Many Peninsulars had Creole wives and children. Furthermore, Peninsulars cornered by the rebels commonly claimed to be Creoles. The downtrodden indigenous and mestizo peasants who followed Hidalgo lacked military discipline, and to them, Creoles and Peninsulars seemed equally arrogant. As Hidalgo's multitude reached sixty, seventy, eighty thousand, it began to look to many Creoles like their own worst nightmare.

Few Mexican Creoles, or town dwellers of any description, joined Hidalgo, and his unruly followers dispersed after only a

few months. Hidalgo himself was captured, forced to repent publicly, and then executed. As an exemplary lesson, Hidalgo's head was dangled in a metal cage on a corner of the Guanajuato granary where so many Spaniards had died. But the revolutionary genie would not go back into the bottle. In southern Mexico, where indigenous communities retained village identities and lands from before the conquest, one of Hidalgo's officers still raised the torch of rebellion. He, too, was a priest, but a modest and practical one, very unlike the grandiose visionary Hidalgo. Father José María Morelos was not a Creole at all, but a mestizo, and a more able leader in every way. His army was well organized and his main goals were clear: an end to slavery, to the caste system, and to the tribute paid by indigenous people. Morelos prohibited the use of caste classifications. All born in Mexico were simply "Americanos." In 1813, he declared outright independence. His movement still did not attract many Creoles, but it had staying power—at least until Father Morelos was caught and executed in 1815. By then, small bands of patriot guerrillas had been fighting for years in several regions of Mexico, and with Morelos gone, they continued to defy the government, causing heavy military expenses, living off the land like bandits, and gradually gnawing away at the fabric of colonial rule.

In Peru, independence got a slower start. Peruvian Creoles had already glimpsed their nightmare scenario a few decades earlier, in the 1780s, when the great indigenous rebellion of Tupac Amaru II rocked the Andes. Although a generation in the past by 1808, Tupac Amaru's rebellion was far from forgotten, and it had given Peruvian Creoles a vivid appreciation of the dangers inherent in mobilizing the indigenous people against the Peninsulars. So they avoided revolt, aside from a few early protests, even at the cost of putting up with arrogant Europeans who got all the best government jobs. Overall, Peru, along with other Andean areas such as Bolivia and Ecuador, remained

comparatively quiet during the crisis years of the early 1810s as major revolts erupted elsewhere.

Leading Creoles in "fringe" colonies such as Venezuela and Argentina were less cautious. They chafed under imperial trade restrictions that favored silver production in the core areas of Peru and Mexico. And the grassy plains of both Venezuela and Argentina abounded in horses and horsemen, very useful in premechanized warfare. Unlike the movements of Hidalgo and Morelos, which were uprisings from below, the patriot juntas of Caracas and Buenos Aires began as *cabildos abiertos*, gatherings of the most influential men in the two cities. This was revolution from above, led by confident, well-traveled Creoles, some of whom had witnessed European events firsthand. When the crisis of legitimacy began in Spain, Creoles in Caracas and Buenos Aires reacted like those elsewhere. Gradually, however, they shelved their protestations of loyalty to the king, embraced the liberal revolution, and moved toward full independence. Their critics called this "taking off the mask of Fernando."

In Venezuela, all this had already happened by early 1811. The problem was making it stick. The first Venezuelan republic crumbled when an earthquake, convincing evidence of divine disapproval, struck Caracas a year later. Nor was the earthquake the patriots' only problem. In the heart of Venezuela, beyond the mountainous Caribbean coast with its plantations of cacao, lay the flood-prone tropical plains of the Orinoco River basin, a land of cattle and dark-skinned cowboys called *llaneros*, who ate mostly beef, carried lances, and rode as if born on horseback. To put it mildly, the llaneros had no sympathy for the elite, plantation-owning revolutionaries of Caracas, who regarded them more or less as scum. When the Caracas junta went so far as to deny the authority of Fernando VII, the llaneros opted to defend their king, and their horses' hooves kept the ground trembling long after the earthquake had subsided. As long as the llaneros opposed them, the patriots would never win in Venezuela.

In Argentina, the revolutionary junta had an easier time gaining military dominance. The patriot advantage began back in 1806 and 1807, when the Spanish and the British were enemies. During those years, two British expeditions landed in the viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata. They were both defeated, not by Peninsular forces, but by local militias. So Creole patriots there had the upper hand militarily when Spain's Napoleonic crisis began. By May 1810, Peninsular control had ended once and for all in Buenos Aires. Other regions of the Río de la Plata viceroyalty, however, showed little inclination to follow the lead of Buenos Aires. Whether patriots or royalists, people in the interior resented the airs of overweening Creole aristocrats from the capital. The wars of independence in the Río de la Plata therefore consisted mostly of fighting between armies from Buenos Aires on the one hand, and provincial armies, whether royalist or patriot, on the other.

By 1815, with the execution of Morelos in Mexico, royalist victories in Venezuela (and elsewhere, such as Colombia and Chile), Peru still firmly in Spanish hands, and patriots fighting among themselves in the Río de la Plata, the wars for Spanish American independence stood at a low ebb. The patriots had not yet succeeded in getting enough people on their side. What did they really have to offer, anyway?

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 little 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 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.

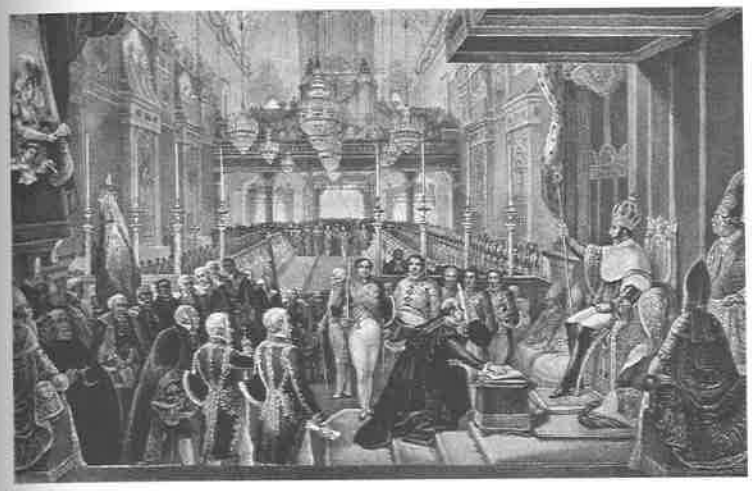
Brazilian independence provides a good illustration of the way this worked. As Spanish America underwent military upheaval and political mass mobilization during the 1810s, Brazil remained relatively undisturbed under the rule of João VI. Of course there was some discontent. To have the royal court in Rio de Janeiro was expensive, as people noticed after the novelty wore off. A ruinous and unpopular war with Spanish-speaking neighbors began on Brazil's southern border. And João caved in to British pressure and legally restricted the slave trade, which irritated slave owners, even though the restrictions were ineffective. British ships had once participated aggressively in the slave trade, but the British government later renounced the practice and pressured other nations to do the same. The policy responded both to humanitarian antislavery sentiments and to the hope of expanding the market for British goods by turning slaves into consumers.

Foreigners, especially the British and French, had flocked to Brazilian ports since 1808. They took advantage of free trade, brought liberalizing changes of attitude, and stimulated political ferment. The year 1817 saw a localized but notable political explosion in the major northeastern province of Pernambuco, an attempted liberal revolution more significant than any preceding it in Brazil. During a few heady weeks, the Pernambucan rebels declared a republic, discussed a constitution, and called each other "patriot," clearly showing the influence of up-to-date political ideas. This liberal republicanism theoretically favored the great majority of Brazilians, but liberalism was still too unfamiliar to inspire mass support in Brazil. Therefore, the revolt of 1817 was easily crushed after a few weeks, when João's forces arrived in Pernambuco to put it down.

Portuguese actions nudged Brazil closer to independence in 1820. Since Napoleon's defeat, Portugal had wanted its king back

in Lisbon, and the Portuguese assembly had begun to insist that João return. The assembly was very unhappy with João's 1815 declaration raising Brazil from the legal status of colony to that of kingdom, like Portugal itself. That declaration made Brazil and Portugal juridically equal, with João king of both. The old aspiration not to be a colony had finally been granted, but the Portuguese assembly wanted Brazil reduced once more to colonial status. João returned to Lisbon in 1821, leaving his son, Prince Pedro, behind in Rio to watch the Brazilian situation. The moment was fraught with uncertainties. Various Brazilian provinces established liberal juntas and sent their own representatives to Lisbon, bypassing Rio. Faced simultaneously with the threat of recolonization *and* a loss of control over the provinces, the Brazilian elite of Rio de Janeiro discovered the patriotic pride of native birth and popular sovereignty.

By 1822, Rio's native-born elite had formed a Brazilian Party that claimed to represent the Brazilian people against Portuguese recolonization. While defining "the Brazilian people" to include everyone (except slaves) born in Brazil, the Brazilian Party also accepted Portuguese-born converts to the cause of Brazilian patriotism, and they found a crucial convert in the Portuguese-born Prince Pedro himself. Pedro had been prepared for this eventuality by his father, who foresaw that Brazilian independence might become inevitable. If Pedro himself declared Brazil independent, the monarchy might be preserved, and Brazil could at least be kept in the Braganza royal family. When the Portuguese assembly demanded that Pedro, too, return to Portugal, the prince publicly announced his refusal from a palace balcony, and the people of Rio celebrated deliriously in the public squares. By year's end, Pedro had officially declared Brazil an independent constitutional monarchy with himself as monarch, and he called for representatives of the sovereign people to write a constitution. A handful of Portuguese army garrisons in the north and south refused to recognize Brazilian independence, but all were defeated or withdrew



CORONATION OF PEDRO I. The 1822 crowning ceremony of Emperor Pedro I of Brazil deployed the traditional pageantry of monarchy, a tried-and-true formula that contrasted with the innovative but difficult and risky republican experiments then beginning in Spanish America. *Wikimedia Commons.*

within a few months, without any need for the mass military mobilization that had proved so risky for Spanish American elites. A mass mobilization would certainly have threatened the institution of slavery in Brazil, where half the potential fighters were slaves.

By the end of 1823, the Brazilian Party had achieved its goal. It had made Brazil independent while maintaining the social hierarchy that kept the slave-owning elite in charge. Even the provinces that had lately formed their own liberal juntas accepted the proposition that Prince Pedro—now Pedro I, Emperor of Brazil—embodied the cause of Brazilian patriotism. Had the emperor not promised a constitution? There was disappointment ahead, but for now, the cloning of a legitimate monarchy had provided Brazil a political unity that contrasted starkly with Spanish America.

PATRIOT VICTORIES IN SPANISH AMERICA, 1815–25

Meanwhile, Spanish American nativists regained momentum after 1815. By that time, Napoleon had met defeat at the battle of Waterloo. Fernando VII had recovered his throne, renounced the liberal constitution of Cádiz, and set out to crush patriot rebels in America. Spanish recalcitrance left the rebels nowhere to go but forward. In South America, Spanish royalist forces held the Peruvian Andes until ultimately defeated—in a great, continental "pincer" maneuver—by patriot armies that had originated on the distant plains frontiers of Venezuela and Argentina. In Mexico, Creoles entered an alliance with the heirs of the Morelos movement and backed reluctantly into independence.

The guerrilla followers of Father Morelos had remained strong in the rugged country south of Mexico City after their leader's death in 1815, continuing their stubborn fight but unable to defeat the royalists. Then European events intruded once again when Spain had its own liberal revolution in 1820. Spanish liberals forced the tyrannical Fernando VII to restore the constitution. The mystique of the monarchy suffered, and many formerly royalist Mexican Creoles felt betrayed. Within months, a Creole army commander named Agustín de Iturbide began to parlay with the guerrillas. His contact on the patriot side was Vicente Guerrero, a mestizo and man of the people. When Iturbide and Guerrero joined forces, the independence of Mexico was at hand.

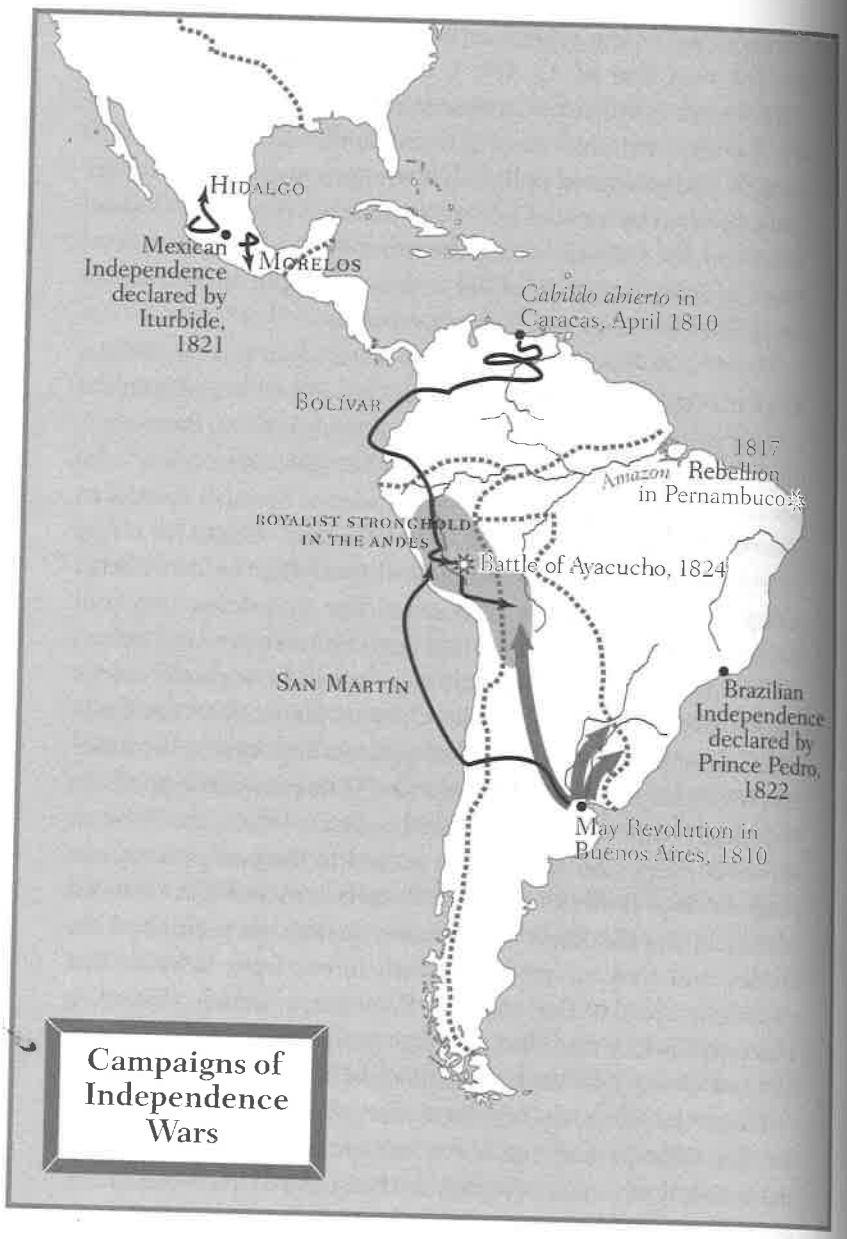
Iturbide and Guerrero rallied a winning coalition with guarantees of an independent, constitutional Mexican monarchy that preserved traditional religious and military privileges and offered social "union" (vaguely implying the equality of all Americanos with Peninsular Spaniards). According to the traditional social hierarchy, Iturbide and not Guerrero was the natural candidate for monarch. In 1821, a triumphant Iturbide entered

Mexico City, where enthusiastic crowds called for his coronation the next year as Agustín I. But the monarchical solution did not work in Mexico. Crowned or not, Iturbide was a Creole like the rest, without a drop of royal blood, and years of patriot struggle had generated political convictions and animosities not easily soothed by a make-believe monarch. When, after a short year in power, Iturbide closed the newly formed congress, composed of representatives of the sovereign people, military leaders ejected him and ushered in a republic.

Meanwhile, patriot armies from Venezuela and Argentina, former fringe areas of Spanish America, were converging on the second great core area of the Spanish colonization, Peru.

Despite many previous failures, the tenacious man who became the single most important leader of Spanish American independence, Simón Bolívar, "the Liberator," began his string of triumphs in 1817. Bolívar had participated in the Venezuelan independence struggle from the start. The early defeat of patriot forces by the royalist llaneros had been Bolívar's personal defeat. He learned from it and planned to get the llaneros on the patriot side. Setting up his base in the Orinoco plains, far from Caracas, Bolívar used feats of physical prowess and Americano nativism to attract llaneros. Here was one Caracas aristocrat whom the tough tropical cowboys could respect. When the llaneros switched sides, the momentum moved to the patriot cause. In August 1819, Bolívar's army of llaneros crossed the Orinoco plains during the floods of the rainy season, then climbed the Andes and took surprised Spanish forces from behind. The viceregal capital of Bogotá fell to Bolívar in a sudden, shattering triumph. By late 1822, Bolívar's forces also captured both Caracas and Quito, now controlling all of northern South America.

Far to the south, during those years, the brilliant general José de San Martín had trained a combined Argentine-Chilean patriot army in western Argentina, then crossed the Andes unexpectedly, in a surprise attack similar to Bolívar's, and decisively



Campaigns of Independence Wars

defeated Chilean royalists. San Martín met a hero's welcome in the Chilean capital, where his movement gathered strength for three years before launching an expedition northward against Lima. The viceroy of Peru withdrew from Lima into the Peruvian highlands. Then San Martín's frustrations began. A year after capturing Lima and declaring Peruvian independence, his army had bogged down, unable to finish the job. At this point, Bolívar invited San Martín to a personal meeting in the port city of Guayaquil. What passed between the two patriot generals at their Guayaquil meeting was confidential, but whatever was said, San Martín immediately returned to Chile, then to Argentina, and eventually to Europe, leaving Bolívar to lead the final assault on Spanish power in South America.

It took Bolívar two years to equip an army equal to the task, but resounding victories in 1824 made Bolívar the liberator of two more countries, one of which, Bolivia, even took his name. In the second of these battles, Ayacucho, fought at an exhausting altitude of over ten thousand feet, the patriots captured the last Spanish viceroy in America. Everything after the battle of Ayacucho was essentially a mop-up operation. The long and bloody Spanish American wars for independence were finally over. Only Cuba and Puerto Rico remained under Spanish control, where they would stay for the rest of the 1800s.

UNFINISHED REVOLUTIONS

Flags waved, cheering crowds lined the streets, and victorious patriot armies paraded throughout Latin America, but independence meant less than met the eye. The broad contours of colonial Latin American culture and society underwent no profound, sudden change. After all, liberal ideas had never been the popular driving force of independence movements that derived more energy from what we might call identity politics. And for all the talk of "America for the Americans," the old hierarchy

of status and race created by colonization, with native Americans and Africans at the bottom, remained substantially unaltered. The language and laws of the Iberian colonizers became those of the new nations, and the Creole descendants of the conquerors continued to profit from the ill-paid labor of the conquered and the enslaved. In that sense, independence did not undo colonialism in Latin American nations. Rather, it made them postcolonial—now self-governing, but still shaped by a colonial heritage.

Many things changed hardly at all. Latin American women, for example, would find the new republics nearly as patriarchal as the old colonies, even though women had fought hard for independence and often died for it. Patriot women became powerful symbols. Andean women had led the way back in the 1780s. Imagine Manuela Beltrán, a poor woman, stepping up to a royal edict announcing new taxes, pulling it down, and trampling it as an angry crowd roared its approval. That was in Colombia's Comunero rebellion. Imagine Micaela Bastidas and Bartolina Sisa, tormented and executed in front of another crowd, this time a jeering group of enemies, alongside their husbands, Tupac Amaru and Tupac Catari. That was in Peru and Bolivia.

Juana Azurduy, another Bolivian, was remembered for wearing a man's uniform and leading a cavalry charge in which she personally captured the enemy flag, a feat that normally defined the superior male. Because of her exploits, we know more about Azurduy than some of the others. She was a mestiza whose Quechua-speaking mother apparently "married up" into a family of property. Born in 1780, Juana grew up in Chuquisaca, a city of courts, churches, convents, a university, and many Peninsular Spaniards, one of whom apparently killed her father but went unpunished—because he was a Peninsular. Now an orphan, Juana entered a convent but rebelled and was expelled at the age

of seventeen. She married a man who shared her affinity for indigenous culture. In addition to Quechua, Azurduy learned the other major indigenous language of Bolivia, Aymara. The official commendation after the cavalry charge congratulated her for "heroic actions not common at all in women." Interestingly, though, during those same years, the name of the martyred patriot women of Cochabamba, a Bolivian city where many had heroically died rather than surrender to the Spanish, became synonymous with a fighting spirit. Whenever special courage was needed in battle, patriot officers taunted their men with a famous challenge: "Are the women of Cochabamba present?"

In 1816, the same year as Juana Azurduy's glorious charge, Policarpa Salavarrieta was hanged in Bogotá. She had been caught carrying messages, a more usual activity for patriot women, like providing supplies—not to mention keeping households running, crops planted, and animals tended in the men's absence. Both Salavarrieta and the Mexican woman María Gertrudis Bocanegra de Lazo de la Vega became patriot martyrs despite their Spanish heritage—both women had Peninsular parents. Gertrudis Bocanegra saw her son and her husband executed as patriots. Then, like Policarpa, she too was caught with a message and executed. Like Policarpa, she spoke for the patriot cause in the moments before her death.

The wars of independence provided stories of patriotic heroism to inspire future generations. But in the aftermath of war, many patriot leaders became disillusioned. Bolívar himself came to think that Spanish Americans "did not understand their own best interests," and his mood turned authoritarian. Before his death in 1830, he complained that he had "plowed the sea," accomplishing nothing.

Immediate change was not the measure of independence, however. The long-term impact was more important. Wherever

the patriot cause had resorted to mass mobilization, fighters of indigenous, African, or mixed blood gained political prominence. The old social hierarchies, no matter how stubborn, lost their explicit, public justification in new republics with liberal constitutions. To gain independence, white elites from Mexico to Argentina had vigorously waved the banner of popular sovereignty. Now they would have to govern through new institutions, such as elected assemblies, always in the name of "the people": the Brazilian people, the Chilean people, the Colombian people.

The old rallying cry "Americanos!" was no longer sufficient, as Spanish America shattered into a dozen national pieces. The viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata alone broke into four independent countries: Bolivia, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Argentina. It would take years for these new nations to acquire much legitimacy in people's minds. After the Spanish and Portuguese outsiders were defeated, it became much harder to sell the idea of a common political purpose uniting all Brazilians or Chileans or Colombians, whether they be mighty plantation owners or hardscrabble peasants. Despite the achievement of independence, the struggle to decolonize Latin America in a deeper sense was only just beginning.