

*In 1810 a Mexican priest gave a cry that came to be known as El Grito de Dolores, sparking his country's eleven-year battle for independence from Spain.*

**O**n September 16, 1810, Roman Catholic priest Miguel Hidalgo called the villagers of Dolores, Mexico, to mass, where he shouted, "Will you free yourselves?" It was known later as *El Grito de Dolores* or (cry of Dolores), and the ensuing speech focusing on racial equality, the redistribution of land, and political freedom from Spain, inspired listeners to rise up against their colonizers. The poorly armed villagers—mostly rural workers and peasants with little more than slings and knives—had just cause: the Spanish Crown enforced a strict caste system in the colony, and 10 percent of African Mexicans were enslaved while indigenous Indians faced harsh discrimination. Angered by decades of oppression, the rebel forces gained additional sympathizers but won few victories against Royalist troops sent to quash the uprising. Hidalgo was caught and executed, but another priest—Jose Morelos—led the fight, which continued for eleven violent years before independence was won.



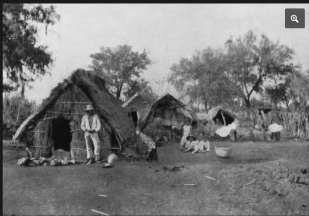
On September 27, 1821, General Agustín de Iturbide entered Mexico City and officially proclaimed that the Mexican Empire was no longer under Spanish control. September 27, 1821, Mexico City, Mexico. Credit: DEA/G. DAGLI ORTI/De Agostini/Getty Images



On September 16, 1810, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a Roman Catholic priest, gave a rousing speech on the church steps of Dolores, where he urged villagers to overthrow Spain's rule. He was executed less than a year later. September 16, 1810. Credit: DEA/G. DAGLI ORTI/De Agostini/Getty Images



The Virgin of Guadalupe, a saint native to New Spain, became the patron saint of the rebels during their struggle for independence from Spain. About 1524. Credit: bluebird131/r



Rural workers and peasants—many of them indigenous Indians, African Mexicans, and *mestizos* (people of European and Indian heritage)—formed the majority of rebel forces. About 1860, Salamanca, Mexico. Credit: Hulton Archive/Print Collector/Getty Images