Affinity

MOULEDOUX | BLAND
LEGRAND | BRACKETT
ATTORNEYS AT LAW, NEW ORLEANS

Volume 2, Issue 9 September 16, 2022

By: Mike Parks

"Viva México! Viva la Independencia! Vivian los héroes!"

If you polled ten people on the date of Mexican Independence Day, chances are the resounding answer would be Cinco de Mayo. But that would be wrong. Mexican Independence Day, Día de la Independencia, is September 16th and always has been—well, at least since 1810.

Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (1753-1811)

It all started with a courageous Catholic priest named Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla and his followers. At that time, Mexico had been under Spanish colonial rule for over 300 years, during which the native population lacked representation, and individuals were expropriated of their farmland and personal wealth. Father Hidalgo, a parish priest in Dolores, was a free-thinker who had been plotting against the ruling government; upon learning that he had been betrayed and discovered by the Spaniards, he sprang into action. He had his followers arm themselves, and from his pulpit, with church bell ringing, he encouraged them to revolt. In his now-famous speech, known as the Grito de Dolores (Cry of Dolores), he demanded the end of Spain's rule in Mexico. The precise text of Father Hidalgo's speech is unknown, but most agree that his words included, "Long live Our Lady of Guadalupe, death to bad government and death to the gachupines [the Spaniards]. Unfortunately for Father Hidalgo and his followers, the movement was suppressed, Father Hidalgo was captured and executed on July 30, 1811. After more struggle, and revolution, Spain agreed to recognize Mexico as an independent nation on September 27, 1821.

Why had Father Hidalgo sought to rebel? Many factors were involved and dated back to Spain's initial dominion over Mexico which began with the 1519 arrival in Veracruz of the Spanish explorer and Conquistador Hernan Cortés. In May of 1521, Cortés and his followers attacked and conquered the Aztec empire which had previously ruled over Mexico for about 100 years. Cortés renamed the land as Nueva España, or New Spain. Within 50 years, the Spaniards controlled the Aztec empire and had enslaved most of

the indigenous inhabitants. With their spread across the land, the Spaniards brought with them diseases which ravaged the indigenous people of Nueva España; between 1521 and 1605, approximately 24 million died of disease.

Catholic missionaries began arriving in 1523 and they were able to convert millions to Catholicism. There were conflicts over wealth and power between colonists who had arrived in Nueva España and Spaniards born there. Spain's King Carlos II did not appreciate the growing influence of the Catholic Church in New Spain, and he expelled the Jesuits in the late 1700s. Spain's grip on Mexico was significantly weakened when Napoleon Bonaparte of France occupied Spain in 1808. Nueva España was also affected by the political and economic upheaval.

Following Father Hidalgo's unsuccessful revolt, two important men, Agustin de Itúrbide and Vincente Guerrero, continued the cause to end Spain's rule, and in 1821, they drafted a Mexican constitution. Itúrbide thought the better of it, because within a year, he declared himself the country's emperor. He was overthrown by the famous Antonio López de Santa Anna in 1823, who lasted as president until 1836. Santa Anna's battle at the Alamo and his ultimate defeat by Sam Houston and the Texans at San Jacinto marked the end of his power.

Mexico was occupied by the French in the mid-1800s, but Porfirio Diaz was the country's president from 1876 to 1909. He was a dictator who was not very favorable to the poor and downtrodden, instead doing all he could to help the wealthy. The Mexican people initiated the Mexico Revolution, a ten-year civil war with 2 million casualties until it ended in 1922. Lázaro Cárdenas became president in 1934 and he helped to establish tracts of land which were shared communally, and which greatly helped the nation's citizens and economy.

Mexico today is blessed with abundant natural resources, a booming tourism trade, and an industrial base which is expanding by the year. Factories and plants have been built in more rural areas which has drawn many away from population centers such as Mexico City, and helped to redistribute some of the country's wealth. Mexico remains a vital Latin American country, and every year, on September 16, the President of the Republic of Mexico is seen on national television honoring Father Hidalgo and Mexico's independence by shouting from the balcony of the National Palace in Mexico City: "Viva México! Viva la Independencia! Vivian los héroes!"