

## **Guadalupe Victoria: Patriot and First Constitutional President**

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The beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century found Mexico entering a period of unrest. The imprisonment of King Ferdinand VII by the French left a power vacuum in the Americas. This led to civil unrest that led to the *Grito de Dolores* and Mexico's quest for independence. While Mexico struggled for eleven years for independence, many leaders emerged to carry the torch lit by Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla on September 16, 1810. Many of the early leaders of the revolution would unfortunately be captured and executed by the Spanish crown, but there were a few that would survive and eventually lead Mexico into a new era. Among those leaders was Guadalupe Victoria.

Guadalupe Victoria was born in 1786 in the Villa de Tomazula, Durango with the name José Miguel Ramón Adaucto Fernández y Félix. At an early age he went to study and live at the Seminary of Durango and then studied Jurisprudence at the Real y Pontificia Universidad de Mexico. When word began to spread about the fight for independence, José left school and joined the cause. He joined the army of Father José María Morelos y Pavón and saw action in many battles. He proved his valor in the taking of Oaxaca when during the battle, he hurled his sword across a large water filled pit and proclaimed, "Va mi espada en prenda, voy por ella" (I pledged my sword, now I will go get it). José's actions rallied the men as he jumped into the pit to go across, leading to an insurgent victory against the Spanish.

His bravery on the battlefield led him to rise in rank in the army. It was also during this time that José changed his name to Guadalupe Victoria. "Guadalupe" was chosen in honor of the patron saint of Mexico, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and "Victoria" was chosen in honor of the

eventual outcome of the revolution, victory. While his early encounters were triumphant, Victoria did see defeat in 1815 while fighting in Vera Cruz. The revolutionary army as a whole would see defeat due to the capture and execution of Father José María Morelos y Pavón. The loss of their leader caused the rebel forces to split; two officers that continued to fight were Guadalupe Victoria and Vicente Guerrero.

As the war waged on, Victoria took on the strategy of guerrilla warfare. His small group of men attacked convoys and groups of soldiers along the Puente del Rey (The Kings Bridge). Many times Victoria was offered a pardon by royalists, only to reject them in honor of the cause of liberty and independence. By 1821, Victoria found himself on the edge of Mexican independence as a result of General Agustin de Iturbide's Plan de Iguala, which ended the war. Victoria came out of hiding to show his support of the Plan de Iguala and in order to find Iturbide to try to convince him to make some changes to the plan. Victoria questioned why Iturbide wanted a monarchy, when they had just waged a devastating decade long war to sever ties with a monarch; he believed Mexico should be a republic. Iturbide did not agree with him and showed his dismay. Soon after Iturbide became the monarch, Victoria was arrested.

With the help of some supporters, Victoria escaped his captor and once again fought against a monarch. Finding a supporter in Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, Victoria once again fought against an oppressive government. They eventually came together in support of the Plan de Casa Mata, which abolished the monarchy and called for a new congress to convene. As Iturbide was escorted by Victoria to a vessel that would lead him to exile, a new congress began to be formed.

In 1824, Guadalupe Victoria was elected the first president of the Mexican Republic with Nicolás Bravo as his vice president as a result of the Constitution of 1824. For the first time, Mexico governed itself as a republic. The first constitutional congress convened a few months later, in an atmosphere of slight national tranquility and stability. The congress also established an immigration policy that would allow for immigrants from the United States to move to Mexico. This policy had long lasting effects, since it helped lead to the Texas Revolution. Victoria's presidency was not without its problems; his presidency saw the passage of the first federal expulsion law for the Spanish. It was also during this period that Bravo led a revolt against Victoria, which was defeated by General Vicente Guerrero, who became the next president. Guadalupe Victoria was the only president during the first republic that served his entire term. Guerrero ushered in an era of political instability, with centralists and federalists fighting for power with the Mexican presidency being the ultimate prize. This was the era in which Mexico's presidents would not serve an entire term.

After leaving the presidency, Guadalupe Victoria served as a senator from Vera Cruz, Durango and Governor of Puebla. In 1838, Victoria rallied the defenses in Vera Cruz against the French in the Pastry War. In 1841, Victoria married Maria Antonieta Bretón as his health was beginning to fail. Guadalupe Victoria, hero of the wars for independence and the first president of the Republic of Mexico, died as a result of an epileptic seizure in 1843. Mexico had lost a true patriot that had put his country first and had proved that one man can make a difference.