

# The Plan de Iguala and Mexican Independence

By: Dr. R. Bruce Winders, Alamo Historian & Curator

Mexico's adoption of the Plan de Iguala was a critical step in the nation's history. As a

document, it is the equivalent of the United State's Declaration of

Independence in which the colonies severed ties with Great Britain. In

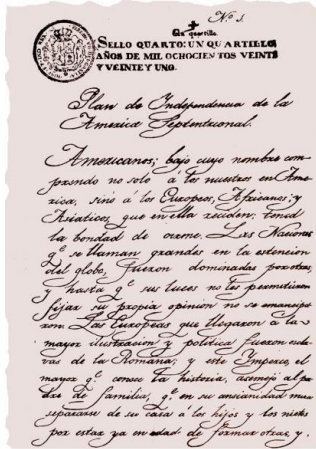
this case, though, Mexico severed its ties to Spain. Like its American

counterpart, the Mexican document not only officially instituted

autonomy, the plan also laid out important principles to guide the new

nation. As an unintended consequence, though, the Plan de Iguala

unleashed political and social currents that would be felt throughout



Mexico for decades to come.

As discussed [in a previous issue of \*The Alamo Messenger\*](#), Spanish Mexico had a well entrenched caste system that ensured social order. The most privileged were the *peninsulares* (European-born Spaniards) while Mexico's least privileged were Africans and those with African blood. *Criollos* (Mexican-born Spaniards), the *mestizos* (mixed Spanish and Indian), and Indians fell between the former two aforementioned groups in the order listed. Thus, racial biology determined one's place in Mexico's rigid societal rankings.

By 1821, Mexico had experienced more than ten years of civil war ignited by Father Miguel Hidalgo's 1810 Grito de Dolores. In the beginning the revolt was largely a peasant movement led by *criollo* priests and *mestizos* that targeted all Spaniards. Hence, the conflict had forced a closer bond between Mexico's two upper classes as a means of preserving the existing royal order as well as their lives. Although small pockets of resistance remained, after Hidalgo's capture, trial, and execution, Spain's hold over Mexico was secure as long as the majority of the

*criollo* class supported the *peninsulares* in maintaining power. However, a change in the relationship between these two factions would uproot the status quo.

Dissatisfaction with this state-imposed hierarchy existed among a majority of native-born Mexicans. Hidalgo's revolt had capitalized on this anger, drawing tens of thousands of Indian villagers into his insurgent army. *Criollos*, forced into a coalition with the *peninsulares* for self preservation, gradually began to question their continued alliance to the *gachupines* (a derogatory term for *peninsulares*). If both classes were Spaniards, why should Spanish-born subjects have more opportunities than those born in Mexico? This questioning would lead to major changes in Mexico.

Many people worked for Mexican independence but one man made it a reality. Colonel Agustin de Iturbide, a *criollo* serving in the Royalist Army in Mexico, created a political solution that brought an end to the conflict between royalists and rebels. Reviewing the situation, Iturbide realized that all Mexicans had suffered under the Spanish, meaning that the *peninsulares* were the real enemy of Mexico's indigenous population. He crafted a framework that offered Mexicans three guarantees: independence, equality, and religion. Iturbide met with insurgents and explained its benefits and secured their cooperation.



"Agustin de Iturbide Oleo Primitivo Miranda" by Primitivo Miranda - [www.bicentenario.gob.mx](http://www.bicentenario.gob.mx).  
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Spanish power, after years of contesting the French at home and rebels throughout the Americas, was waning. By banding together against the European Spanish, Mexicans could claim Mexico for their own without any real threat from the weakened Spanish Army. Convinced that the plan had merit, rebel leaders agreed with Iturbide to set aside their differences so all Mexicans could work for the common good. Meeting at the town of Iguala on February

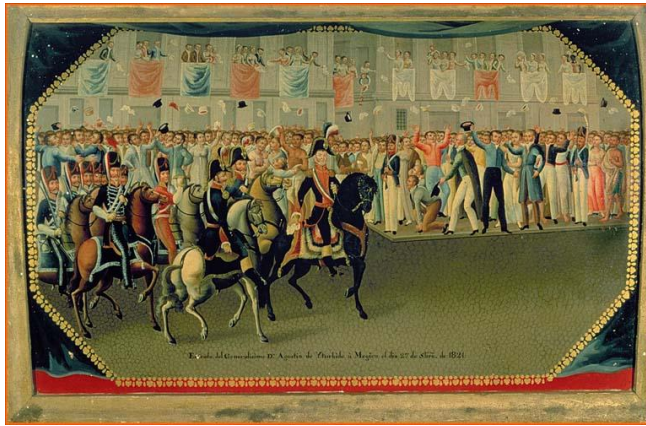


Image Credit: "Entrada del Generalísimo Don Agustín de Iturbide a México" Scanned by the Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de las Revoluciones de México. Licensed under Public Domain via Commons

24, 1821, Iturbide (acting for the *criollos*) and Vicente Guerrero (acting for the former insurgents) signed the plan. Their combined forces, called the Army of the Three Guarantees, pushed aside the remaining royalist army, entering Mexico City in

August. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of that month, Spanish Viceroy Juan O'Donojú added his signature to

the plan, agreeing in the Treaty of Córdoba to recognize Mexico's independence from Spain.

Although officials in Spain refused to recognize the treaty until 1836, Mexico had in fact gained its independence.

In addition to promising independence and equality and enshrining Catholicism as the state religion, the plan also looked towards Mexico's future government. Mexico was to become a constitutional monarchy. As odd as it seems, the Spanish king—Ferdinand VII—would be offered the Mexican crown if he would come to Mexico City. Should he decline, or until the position was filled, a junta would rule in the name of the monarch, organizing government and paving the way for the creation of a constitution for the newly established Mexican nation. All

that remained was the task of building a nation, a task that Mexicans found much harder than throwing off the yoke of Spain.