

## Introduction

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THE PHRASE that gave the title to this volume, “We are now the true Spaniards,” appeared on December 20, 1810, in the first issue of the first insurgent newspaper, *El Despertador Americano*, published in Guadalajara when the insurgent leader Father Miguel Hidalgo occupied that city. Many will no doubt wonder why insurgents, ostensibly seeking independence, would issue such a declaration. The answer is that they did not seek independence. They remained loyal to King Fernando VII and were determined to maintain independence from the French who had invaded Spain. They sought self-government—autonomy—not separation from the Spanish Monarchy. The first issue of *El Despertador Americano* was devoted to criticizing the failure of *peninsulares* (Spaniards from the Iberian Peninsula) to defend the nation from the French, accusing them of cowardice and treason. The insurgents declared that they were “now the true Spaniards, the sworn enemies of Napoleon and his lackeys, the legitimate successors of all the rights of the subjugated [Spaniards] who neither won [the war] nor died for Fernando [VII].”<sup>1</sup>

Mexico’s experience was unique among the nations of the Hispanic world. Not because of its great insurgencies, but because, alone among all the kingdoms of the Spanish Monarchy, including Spain itself, it remained true to Hispanic juridical and political culture.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the charter of the Mexican Federal Republic, the Constitution of 1824, constitutes the culmination of the great Hispanic Revolution that erupted in 1808.

This book examines the complex process that led to Mexican independence and the formation of the *Estados Unidos Mexicanos* (United States of Mexico). It departs from the existing scholarly literature that considers the Hidalgo Revolt, which erupted in 1810, and the subsequent insurgencies as the revolution that achieved independence in 1821. This work challenges that view. It demonstrates that the political transformation within the composite (composed of many lands) Spanish Monarchy—which accelerated after the French invasion of Spain in 1808 and culminated in the Hispanic Constitution of 1812 enacted by the Cortes of Cádiz and the institutions of self-government it established—was the fundamental revolution. This book shows that the insurgencies

were a series of disconnected movements that were ancillary to the political process that shaped the modern Mexican state.

The outcome of the multifaceted process that culminated in the creation of a federal republic in Mexico in 1824 was not inevitable. Rather it was the result of decisions made by individuals and groups in Spain and in the Viceroyalty of New Spain during the period 1808–1824. Most of the scholarly literature on the epoch, however, is deterministic, portraying emancipation as reasonable and predictable. These assumptions about independence have led scholars to underestimate the complexity of the decisions facing Spaniards and novohispanos during the years 1808 to 1824 and to dismiss the vibrant political processes that characterized and shaped the period. Politically active novohispanos from all classes and ethnic groups embraced a wide range of views. Few, however, favored independence. Most believed that the composite Spanish Monarchy provided them with important benefits. Prominent novohispano political leaders frequently discussed and favored establishing a system of federated Hispanic monarchies along the lines of the later British Commonwealth. The novohispano deputies to the Hispanic Cortes proposed it as a solution to the conflict as late as 1821, thirteen years after the collapse of the Spanish Monarchy as a result of the French occupation of the Iberian Peninsula in 1808. If the majority of novohispanos were determined to liberate themselves, they could have achieved that goal easily. New Spain was a vast territory with a population of about six million, including approximately 15,000 European Spaniards, defended by a small royal army comprised primarily of novohispanos. The fact that novohispanos did not separate from the Spanish Monarchy at that time indicates that the overwhelming majority believed that, despite their opposition to some of the royal government's policies and decisions, their religious, social, economic, and political ties to the composite monarchy made union preferable to separation.

The independence of the Viceroyalty of New Spain and the formation of the United States of Mexico occurred within the broader context of the changes sweeping the Western world. The seven years' war (1756–1763), a world war fought in Europe, America—both north and south—and Asia, changed the balance of power in the New World. France withdrew from North America in 1763, leaving the Spanish and British monarchies as the principal contenders for control of the region. Both monarchies introduced new regulations and structures designed to enable them to exercise greater control over their vast and distant territories. As was to be expected, both the British and Spanish Americans objected to the new imperialism. Although the two societies were different, the processes that culminated in the independence of the United States and Mexico began in response to metropolitan threats to their self-interests and to their sense of being an integral and important component of their monarchies. The leaders of these movements considered themselves loyal Britons and Spaniards defending their British and Spanish rights. The British American revolution resulted from “the inability of the disputants to agree upon the nature of the British Empire.”<sup>3</sup> The British Americans opted for independence because the British Monarchy, like the Spanish Monarchy subsequently, proved unwilling to accept a settlement comparable to the later British Commonwealth. The Spanish American kingdoms did not imitate their northern brethren in rebelling against the Crown. Although they opposed as-

pects of the late eighteenth-century reforms, known as the Bourbon reforms, sometimes violently, they did not seek separation from the Spanish Monarchy. Only when the monarchy collapsed in 1808, as a result of the French invasion of the Iberian Peninsula—thirty-two years after the British Americans rebelled—did the Spanish Americans insist on home rule.

It is this work's contention that the independence of Mexico was not the result of an anticolonial struggle; rather, it was the consequence of a great political revolution that culminated in the dissolution of a worldwide political system. The rupture was an integral part of the broader process that was transforming *antiguo régimen* (old regime) societies into modern liberal nation-states. To understand the process that led to the independence of Mexico and the creation of a new nation, we must reexamine the nature of the Spanish Monarchy and evaluate New Spain's separation from the monarchy in the broader context of the Atlantic World.

That transformation occurred after several decades of institutional, economic, political, and ideological change. Although political ideas, structures, and practices changed with vertiginous rapidity within the Spanish Monarchy after 1808, much remained from the *Antiguo Régimen*. The nature of social, economic, and institutional relations changed slowly; the new liberal processes and institutions required time to take hold. During that transitional period, the new liberal institutions and processes frequently intermingled with traditional patterns and practices. Concepts such as authority, sovereignty, legitimacy, citizenship, the people, representation, and independence changed but were not clearly defined and retained elements of the *Antiguo Régimen*.<sup>4</sup>

This work concentrates on politics and political processes or “the political,” as the *nouvelle histoire politique* (new political history) calls it.<sup>5</sup> It seeks to understand the process that led to the creation of the new Mexican nation within the context of the broader political revolution for representative government within the Hispanic world. Although it focuses on what is called *high politics*, it does not assume that *low politics* did not exist. The urban and rural lower classes possessed their own interests and concerns. Some of these, primarily those of the rural groups, have been studied. But scholars generally assume that the *campesinos* (country people or villagers), as well as the urban poor, either did not know, understand, or care about the pressing political issues of the day. That is incorrect. Urban and rural popular groups not only knew and understood the advantages and disadvantages of what has been called the social compact of the monarchy but were also keenly aware of the political revolution carried out by the Hispanic Cortes. The evidence indicates that poor people, whether urban or rural, were not only affected by high politics but also understood their interests and took action to defend them; that is, they engaged in politics. Some participated in autonomist and insurgent movements. Others took advantage of the upheavals to pursue their own concerns. Many others joined members of the urban upper and middle classes who remained loyal to the Crown.<sup>6</sup> Their staunch defense of the Spanish Monarchy continued until independence, thirteen years after the crisis unleashed by the collapse of the monarchy in 1808.

Novohispano efforts to obtain home rule within the Spanish Monarchy comprise a crucial part of the politics of the period. Their discourse was based on the belief that the American realms were not colonies, but equal and in-

tegral parts of the Spanish Crown. Hispanic law, theory, and practice all confirmed the novohispanos' belief that their kingdom was the coequal of those in the Iberian Peninsula. It was a principle the leaders of New Spain insisted upon during the period following the 1808 crisis of the Spanish Monarchy. Indeed, the majority of these leaders demanded equality rather than independence. They sought home rule, not separation from the Spanish Crown. This distinction is crucial because when the documents of the epoch use the word *independence*, they generally mean *autonomy*. Only when the government of Spain refused their demand for autonomy did most novohispanos opt for separation.

Mexicans did not reject Hispanic law and political practices and did not base their government on foreign models. The liberal tradition established in the Cádiz revolution was crucial to postindependence transformations. Since novohispanos played a central role in developing the Hispanic constitutional system and since it was introduced more fully in New Spain than in any other part of the Spanish Monarchy, including Spain itself, it is understandable that Mexican politicians based their Constitution of 1824 on the Cádiz Constitution of 1812.

This volume focuses on two complex aspects of the process that led to the formation of the first federal republic: the political revolution and the insurgency. Chapter 1 sets the stage by demonstrating that the Spanish Monarchy was part of evolving Western culture, not a backward authoritarian state. It is divided into four sections that examine the characteristics of the Antiguo Régimen, the nature of representation within the composite Spanish Monarchy, the formation of American identity, and the eighteenth-century Bourbon reforms designed to centralize and improve the administration of the worldwide Spanish Monarchy. Chapter 2 places the 1808 French invasion of Spain within the broader context of the eighteenth-century international conflicts among European powers and the major transformation of the Atlantic World in the second half of the century. It examines the impact of the political crisis caused by the French invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 1808 and the destruction of the Spanish Monarchy. It also analyzes the similar responses of Spain and New Spain to the crisis, the attempts of novohispanos to establish an autonomous government in the name of the king, and the *golpe de estado* (overthrow of the government) by a few European Spaniards to prevent the formation of a congress of cities in that kingdom. Chapter 3 explores the events of 1809, which included the emergence of representative government in the Spanish Monarchy, the election of the novohispano deputy to the Junta Central Suprema y Gubernativa (Supreme Central Governing Junta), the instructions provided that representative by the cities of New Spain, and the Valladolid conspiracy, which sought once again to convene a congress of the cities in the North American kingdom.

The two revolutions, the political and the insurgency, are examined in Chapter 4. These radical transformations that engulfed New Spain in 1810 occurred almost simultaneously. The political revolution sought to change the worldwide Hispanic Monarchy into a modern nation-state with a representative government for all parts of the Spanish Nation, as the monarchy was now called. Elections for deputies to the Cortes were held by *ayuntamientos* (city governments) throughout New Spain. Nevertheless, before the novohispano deputies could depart for the Cortes that met in Cádiz, a great insurgency erupted in

the *Bajío* that, while advocating the creation of a congress of cities to govern New Spain in the name of the king, relied on force to secure local autonomy or home rule. These two overlapping processes—that once unleashed could not be stopped—influenced and altered one another in a variety of ways for more than a decade. Neither can be understood in isolation.

Chapters 5 and 6 continue the examination of the two revolutions. Chapter 5, which considers the great political revolution, concentrates on the writing of the Constitution of 1812; the role of American, particularly *novohispano*, deputies in the *Cortes Generales y Extraordinarias de la Monarquía Española* (General and Extraordinary Cortes of the Spanish Monarchy) in shaping the Charter of Cádiz and in forcing that body to address issues important to Spanish Americans; and on the first constitutional elections in New Spain. It demonstrates that, contrary to general belief, elections were held throughout the kingdom and that hundreds of thousands, perhaps more than a million, *novohispanos* participated in electing forty-one deputies to the Ordinary Cortes of 1813–14 and establishing five provincial deputations and more than a thousand constitutional *ayuntamientos* in New Spain. It ends with the collapse of the constitutional system in 1814. Chapter 6 examines the fragmented insurgency that engulfed New Spain from 1811 until 1821. Although some insurgent leaders attempted to form an alternative government and wrote the Constitution of Apatzingán, they were unable to sustain a governing authority and provide central direction for the insurgency. The decade-long conflict had staggering human, social, and economic costs. The ferocity that characterized the initial movement and the equally ferocious royalist response became the norm in the ensuing years. Local conditions frequently determined the types of individuals who supported the rebellion and for how long. Most insurgent groups were regionally based and were most successful in their own areas. While the royalists proved unable to stamp out the insurgency, the rebels proved equally unable to defeat the royalist forces.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 are concerned with the separation of Mexico from the Spanish Monarchy and its establishment as an independent nation state. Chapter 7 analyzes the efforts of *novohispano* autonomists to achieve home rule either through the creation of autonomous kingdoms in America ruled by the king or Spanish princes under the Constitution of 1812, or through the Plan of Iguala that declared independence, recognized the Constitution of Cádiz as the law of the land, and invited the king or a Spanish prince to rule. These propositions for a commonwealth similar to the later British Commonwealth were acceptable to *novohispanos* because under the Constitution of 1812 the legislature became the dominant branch of government. In the end, the supporters of the Plan of Iguala, which proposed to create an autonomous kingdom in New Spain, established the independent Mexican Empire because the government in Spain rejected the first proposal. Chapter 8 examines the conflict between Agustín de Iturbide, who believed that he and his army had achieved independence, and the legislators, who were convinced that they represented national sovereignty. Although Iturbide forced the Mexican Cortes to appoint him emperor, he abdicated within a few months when the provinces rebelled against his authoritarian government. Finally, Chapter 9 explains how Mexico, utilizing the institutions established by the Constitution of Cádiz, formed a federal republic in 1824. The Mexican Constitution of 1824 was based on the Hispanic Constitution of 1812 because distinguished *novohispanos*, who had

participated in writing the Charter of Cádiz, wrote the Mexican federal constitution. Mexico implemented the institutions created by the Constitution of 1812 more fully than any other nation in the Hispanic world, including Spain itself. Indeed, most Mexicans considered the Charter of Cádiz their first constitution.

Events in Mexico, particularly the assertion of states' rights by the former provinces, forced Congress to frame a constitution to meet the unique circumstances of the nation. The principal innovations—republicanism, federalism, and a presidency—were adopted to address Mexico's new reality. The monarchy was abolished because both the Spanish and Mexican monarchs had failed as political leaders, not, as is often alleged, because Mexicans imitated the U.S. Charter. Federalism arose naturally from Mexico's earlier experience. The provincial deputations created by the Constitution of Cádiz simply converted themselves into state governments. The distinguished novohispanos, who had assumed leading roles during the Hispanic constitutional era, continued to promote their views in the new Mexican nation they were forming.