

# Latin American Revolutions

After the American Revolution had successfully established a new government that was favored by the colonists, the idea spread all over the world. It would not only go to France, but also to many of the other colonies controlled by the Europeans in Central and South America. These revolutions, while all joined together and called the “Latin American Revolution” are actually a bunch of revolutions that all happened at roughly the same time.

## Haiti

The first country to declare independence from its colonial empire after the British Colonies was Haiti. Haiti was a French colony, and while the King of France was busy with the French Revolution, the colony saw it as the perfect opportunity to start their own government as well. Like many of the colonial islands in the Caribbean, Haiti had a very large slave population. Because of this, the revolt in Haiti was more of a slave revolt than a war between citizens and the king.

Unfortunately for the people in Haiti, very little changed for the average slave family due to the revolution. After gaining their independence from the French in 1803, the Haitian leaders proceeded to execute thousands of white French colonists to try to make a statement. The leaders then established a government that gave them control without giving most of the now-freed slaves any additional rights. Most of these leaders were men who had been educated, since their fathers were slave owners, and their mothers were slaves. Their slave-owner fathers had paid for their educations, and because they were more educated than most of the population at the time, they then used that education to control the country.



*Many of the Central and South American Revolutions, like the Haitian one seen above, were mainly slave revolts. Sadly, many slaves gained little freedom after the revolutions were over.*

Even though the French stopped fighting and granted Haiti independence, they refused to trade with the former colony until the Haitian government agreed to pay reparations to the French for all of the slaves who were freed. Haiti had little choice but to agree, since France was the only country that would trade with them. This debt took them about 125 years to pay off, and Haiti remains one of the poorest countries in the world, even today.

## Mexico

In the early part of the 1800's, France (led by Napoleon) had invaded and taken over Spain. While this transition process was taking place, many of Spain's colonies in the New World had been left alone. Spurred on by Enlightenment ideas, and the success of the American Revolution and even more recent success in Haiti, these countries also began to fight for their independence.

Most of the fighting in Mexico and many other places in the New World went through several stages. The first stage involved fighting



*Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla being executed for encouraging a revolution in Mexico.*

among citizens who wanted to stay connected to the mother colony, and citizens who wanted independence. Often times, slaves and other very poor and disadvantaged workers were involved on the side that favored overthrowing the Spanish government. The next step involved getting the Catholic clergy to support the new government. After failed attempts by the weakened Spanish government to re-establish control over their colonies, most were granted independence, as it was more costly to maintain control of colonies around the world than it was to grant them independence. Mexico, for example, became an officially recognized country by Spain in 1836.



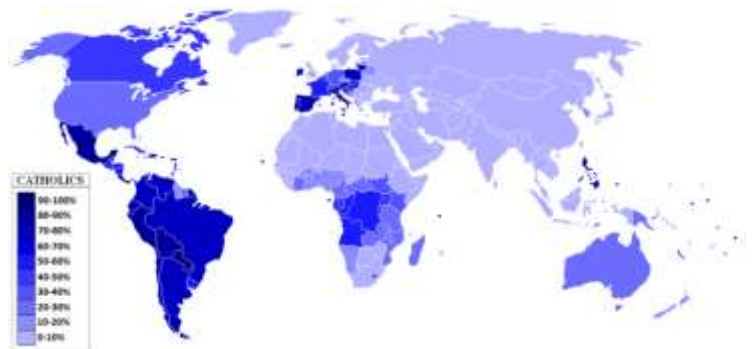
Simon Bolivar

### South American Independence

South American independence movements worked much like the other revolutions. One of the ways that they were different, was that after seeing what Haiti was like, and more importantly, how the slaves gained almost no freedom in the revolution, many South Americans were unwilling to fight to change their government. After all, if they were to fight to change who oppressed and controlled them, it wasn't worth doing. The revolutions in South America were led by small groups of revolutionaries like Simon Bolivar. Bolivar was willing to be extremely violent in his uprisings, and when the first couple didn't work, he continued to try. While the armies were much smaller than they were in America, the South American fighters were noted for how bloody and violent they were. By the end of the 1820's, most of South America had won independence from their European colonizers.

### Significance of the Roman Catholic Church

During the World Cup in Brazil, you may have noticed the very large statue of Jesus Christ over the city of Rio. These statues were commissioned and paid for by the Roman Catholic Church. To this day in Central and South America, the Catholic Church continues to be extremely important in the political and cultural lives of the people living there. Much of this has to do with the fact that prior to independence, there were 300 years of very strong Spanish influence in those regions, and Spain was very closely tied to the Catholic Church.



The strong ties between the Catholic Church and Central and South American regions is evident in the percentage of people in those countries who claim to be Catholic today.

#### Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What group of people were a big part of the Latin American Revolutions that were not a part of the American or French Revolutions?
2. What were the stages of the Mexican War for Independence?
3. Why is the Roman Catholic Church such an important part of people's lives in Latin America?

Write about it. Compare and contrast the Latin American revolutions to either the American or French Revolution.