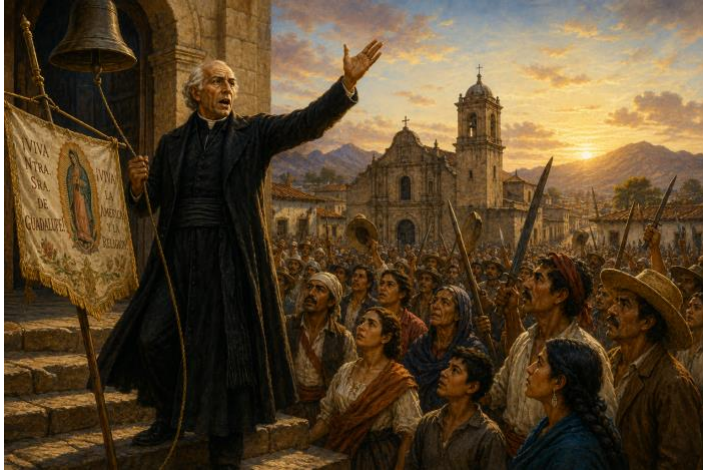




Querétaro and the Beginning of Mexico's War of Independence

By Curtis Jerry Smothers

The Birthplace of a Revolution

Every nation has a defining moment when its struggle for independence begins. For Mexico, that moment traces its roots to the city of **Querétaro**, where a secret conspiracy set in motion one of the most important revolutions in the history of the Americas.

Although the uprising officially began in September 1810, the planning, courage, and determination that made it possible had already taken shape in this historic colonial city.

Life Under Spanish Rule

For nearly three centuries, Mexico—then known as **New Spain**—was governed by Spain. Political authority rested largely in the hands of officials appointed by the Spanish Crown, while many people born in Mexico resented their limited influence over their own country's affairs.

Inspired by the American and French Revolutions, along with Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1808, growing numbers of Mexicans began to believe that independence was both possible and necessary.

The Conspiracy of Querétaro

In 1810, a group of prominent citizens secretly met in Querétaro to plan an uprising against Spanish rule. Among the conspirators were **Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla**, army officer **Ignacio Allende**, and **Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez**, whose courage would prove decisive.

Before the revolt could begin, Spanish authorities uncovered the conspiracy and prepared to arrest its leaders.

Josefa Ortiz Saves the Revolution

Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, often remembered as one of Mexico's great heroines, learned that the conspiracy had been discovered. Despite being watched by Spanish authorities, she found a way to send a warning to Miguel Hidalgo.

Her timely message prevented the movement from being crushed before it had even begun. Without her quick action, Mexico's first major bid for independence might have ended before the first shot was fired.

The Grito de Dolores

Upon receiving the warning, Father Miguel Hidalgo acted immediately.

In the early morning hours of **September 16, 1810**, the parish priest rang the church bells in the town of **Dolores** and called upon the people to rise against Spanish rule. This historic appeal became known as the **Grito de Dolores** ("Cry of Dolores") and is regarded as the beginning of Mexico's War of Independence.

Thousands of farmers, laborers, and ordinary citizens answered Hidalgo's call, transforming a local conspiracy into a national revolution.

Hidalgo's Sacrifice

Although Hidalgo inspired the movement, the first campaign was ultimately unsuccessful. In 1811, he and Ignacio Allende were captured by Spanish forces.

Both men were tried for treason and executed by firing squad. Their deaths, however, did not end the struggle. Instead, they became martyrs whose sacrifices inspired others to continue fighting until Mexico finally achieved independence in 1821.

Honoring a National Hero

The Mexican state of **Hidalgo** was later named in honor of Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, recognizing his leadership in launching the nation's struggle for freedom.

Today, September 16 is celebrated throughout Mexico as Independence Day, when the President of Mexico reenacts the famous *Grito de Dolores* from the National Palace in Mexico City, echoing the words first spoken by Hidalgo more than two centuries ago.

A Lasting Legacy

Querétaro occupies a special place in Mexican history because it was there that the dream of independence first took organized form. The courage of Miguel Hidalgo, Ignacio Allende, Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, and countless ordinary citizens transformed a secret conspiracy into a revolution that changed the future of an entire nation.

Their determination reminds us that history is often shaped not only by armies and governments, but also by individuals willing to risk everything in the cause of liberty.