

Toussaint L'Ouverture

Napoleon was one of the greatest generals who ever lived. But at the end of the 18th century a self-educated slave with no military training drove Napoleon out of Haiti and led his country to independence.

The remarkable leader of this slave revolt was Toussaint L'Ouverture and sometimes the "black Napoleon" or the one who finds an opening. Slave revolts from this time normally ended in executions and failure – this story is the exception.

It began in 1791 in the French colony of Saint Domingue (later Haiti). Though born a slave in Saint Domingue, Toussaint learned of Africa from his father, who had been born a free man before he was captured. Toussaint learned that he was more than a slave, that he was a man with brains and dignity. He was fortunate in having a liberal master who had him trained as a house servant and allowed him to learn to read and write. Toussaint took full advantage of this, reading every book he could get his hands on. He particularly admired the writings French writers, who spoke of individual freedoms and equality like Voltaire. Voltaire said, "freedom is contagious".

In 1789 the French Revolution rocked France. The sugar plantations of Saint Dominique, though far away, would never be the same. Many French revolutionaries considered seriously the question of slavery. Those revolutionaries were not willing to end ALL slavery, but they did give equal rights to free blacks and mulattoes (those of mixed race) in France. Plantation owners in the colonies were furious and fought the law. Finally the revolutionaries gave in and retracted the measure in 1791. So though they had given freedom to many slaves in France, the leaders took that freedom back.

The news of this betrayal triggered mass slave revolts in Saint Domingue, and Toussaint became the leader of the slave rebellion. He brilliantly led his slave army of pitch forks and other weapons.

By 1793, the revolution in France was in the hands of the Jacobins who considered the issue of "equality" and voted to end slavery in the French colonies, including St. Domingue.

Eventually the Jacobins lost power because people were tired of all the deaths they were causing. The French people wanted to get back to business. Napoleon came into power and made slavery in the French colonies legal again which caused a revolt led by Toussaint.

By 1804 Napoleon found it was too expensive to fight Haiti from far away. and Toussaint agreed to terms of peace: Napoleon said he would give Haiti independence if Toussaint agreed to quit being in the leader, which Toussaint agreed to.

A few months later, the French wanted to meet with Toussaint to discuss St. Dominique's independence. Instead, the French took Toussaint and placed him on a ship headed to France. He would then be placed in a prison in the Alps where he starved to death. The fight for independence in St. Domingue continued.

Six months later, Napoleon decided to give up his possessions in the New World and sold the territory to the United States in the Louisiana Purchase.





Simón Bolívar "The Liberator"

(1783–1830). Six nations—Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia—credit Simón Bolívar as their liberator from the rule of Spain. This great statesman, writer, and revolutionary general is known as the George Washington of South America. He inspired men to follow him through the wilderness to fight and die for liberty.

Simón Bolívar was born in Caracas (now in Venezuela) on July 24, 1783, of a noble Spanish family. Orphaned in boyhood, he was educated in Europe. He absorbed the spirit of revolution then widespread in Europe and vowed to free Venezuela.

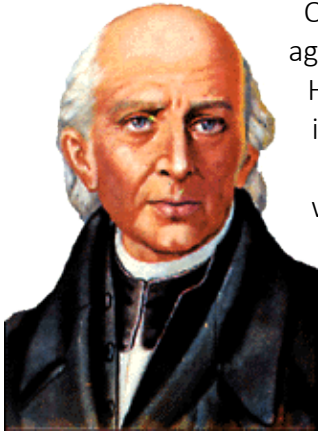
When Napoleon Bonaparte took over Spain, the inspired colonies of Spanish America seized the opportunity to revolt. Venezuela was the first to declare its independence, in 1811. Although that initial revolt failed, for the next 19 years Bolívar continued to lead the fight to free northern South America. His small, poorly equipped forces won amazing victories and met overwhelming defeats. In 1819, Bolívar became the first president of Grand Colombia (Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, and Ecuador). Bolívar helped set 6 countries free in Latin America from Spain, Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. At the height of his power, between 1825 and 1828, he was president (more so a dictator) of these newly conquered lands.

Bolívar wanted to create a United States of South America, but many of the groups within the region wanted to rule themselves. This made Bolívar bitter and broken hearted which impacted his health, and he died at a friend's estate in Colombia on Dec. 17, 1830—seven months after he resigned from power.

Bolívar was a sincere patriot, devoted to the cause of liberty and equality. Years before slavery was officially abolished in Venezuela, Bolívar liberated his own slaves. He also was a pioneer in urging the formation of a union of American republics. However, it took Latin American countries much longer to become democracies like the USA. Corruption ran high through many politicians, and some countries are still run by dictators or one-party governments today.



Miguel Hidalgo Rings the Bell for Freedom!



Miguel Hidalgo is known as the father of Mexican independence. Originally, he was a priest who later became the leader of a peasant army against Spain's army in Mexico, which at this time was called New Spain. His force won some victories, but Hidalgo did not live to see Mexico's independence.

Hidalgo was born in Mexico in 1753. As he grew up, he read books with ideas on freedom and equality that came over the seas during the Enlightenment. He began to see that there was not equality for the peasant workers in Mexico. He also saw that those born in Spain got special treatment and privileges compared to citizens born in Mexico. After training to be a priest, he worked among the native peoples and peasants.

In 1808, France invaded Spain, and the king was removed. This created problems in Mexico. People were not sure they supported the new French government. Others didn't support the old Spanish government. A third group thought it was time for Mexico to be independent. Hidalgo and his friends were the third choice.

In 1810, Hidalgo was warned that he was going to be put in prison. French Loyalists (people loyal to the French government) turn him in as a "revolutionary". On September 16, instead of running away, he ran to his church and rang the bell. People from the countryside came in. Instead of having a church service, the people got a speech. In this speech, Hidalgo said it was time for Mexico to be free! This is known as his famous Cry of Dolores.

Thousands of people followed Hidalgo at first. Hidalgo and his men won several victories against the Spanish army even though they didn't have training or many weapons. The Spanish army, eventually, fought back. Hidalgo was captured and was then tried for treason against Spain, and he was found guilty. So, the Spanish soldiers executed Hidalgo on July 30, 1811, but the war for independence continued. Mexico did not win its independence for another ten years. In 1821, Spain withdrew the last of its troops from Mexico, and Hidalgo was remembered as a hero and freedom fighter!