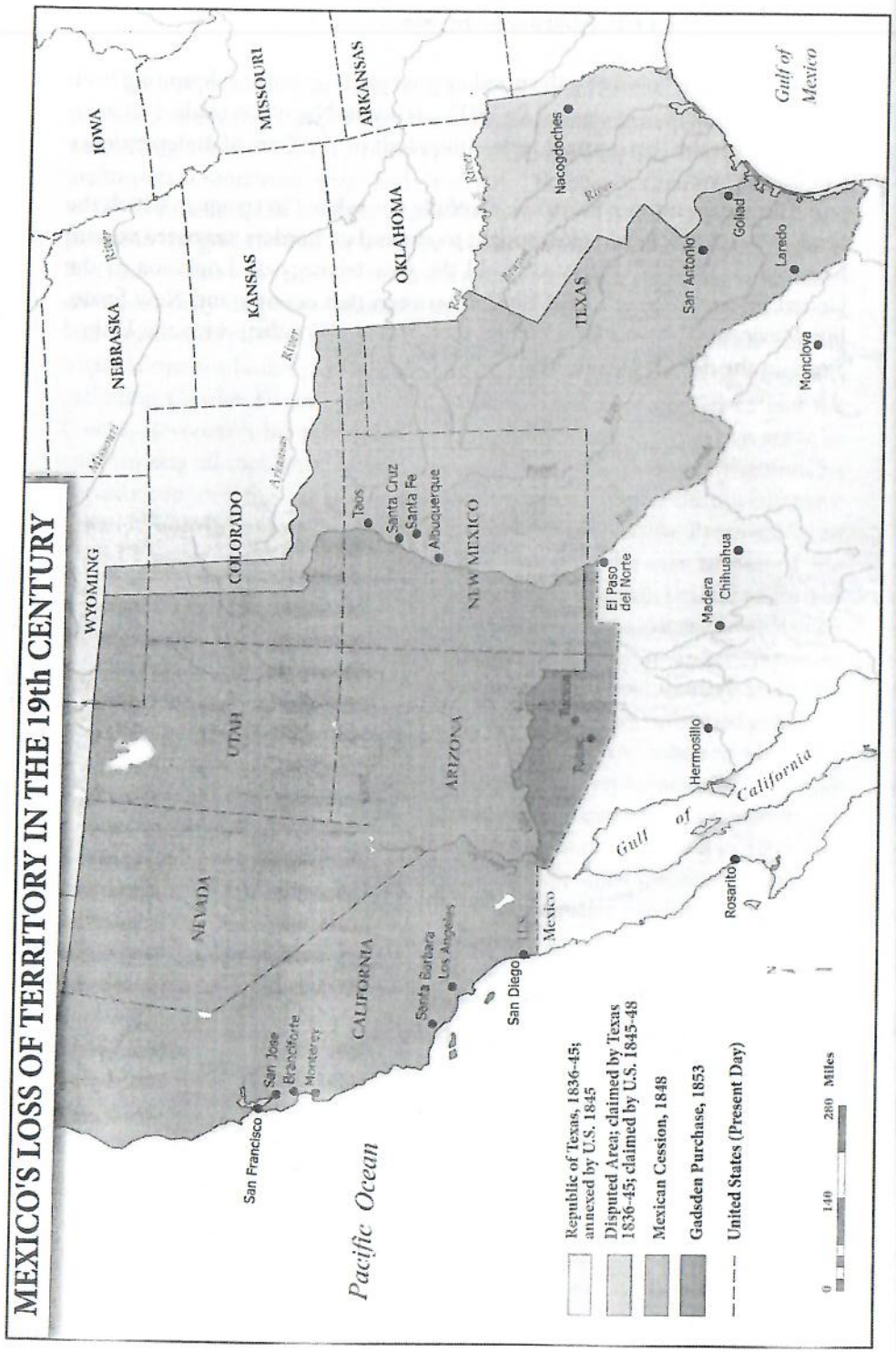

Chapter Two

Independence and Upheaval

On the early morning of September 16, 1810, Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla rang the bells of the parish church of the town of Dolores, Guanajuato, to summon his flock to mass. It was a most unusual hour: dawn had not yet broken, and most of his parishioners looked at him tired and bleary-eyed. His audience included mestizos as well as indigenous campesinos from Dolores and neighboring villages. But Hidalgo did not have an ordinary sermon in mind. He formed part of a group of conspirators against the Spanish Crown, and just a few hours before, fellow rebel Juan de Aldama had warned Hidalgo of his impending arrest. Although the text of his speech has not survived, among the lines attributed to Hidalgo were: "Long live our Virgin of Guadalupe! Death to bad government! Death to the *gachupines*!" All Mexican schoolchildren still learn Hidalgo's fervent invocation to his followers, albeit without the above-mentioned death threats, deleted for the sake of good taste and citizenship. This oration—a speech known today as the *grito de Dolores*, or Cry of Dolores—inaugurated a long series of wars that ultimately freed Mexico from its colonial masters.

The road to nationhood, however, was a difficult one. Hidalgo could not have imagined the chaos his movement would help unleash. The Wars of Independence ushered in a degree of death and destruction not seen since the Spanish conquest and its aftermath. Even after the achievement of independence, political stability remained elusive, and war—both civil and foreign—was the hallmark of the early national period. Political allegiances remained local and regional rather than national, and the caudillos, powerful regional warlords, contested for power. Between 1821 and 1867, rival factions fought for supremacy, without clearly defined political goals. At first, these

factions called themselves "Centralist" and "Federalist," before coalescing into the "Conservative" and "Liberal" parties. Almost fifty governments ruled Mexico between 1821 and 1867, and coups d'état rather than elections defined most presidential terms. At several junctures, it appeared as if Mexico would break apart into several smaller units, just as Gran Colombia had given way to the independent republics of Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. Such a breakup would not have surprised anyone, as the new nation united several separate kingdoms and colonial administrations. As a result, Central America seceded from Mexico in 1823 after a brief union; Texas, in 1836; and in the 1840s, Yucatán threatened to do the same. On four different occasions, foreign armies invaded Mexican soil. The most serious of these invasions, the war with the United States (1846–48), resulted in the U.S. annexation of half of Mexico's territory. The unrest also produced a long economic crisis. Central Mexico's prolonged warfare led to a shutdown of many of the silver mines, the mainstay of the colonial economy. In the absence of workers, the mines flooded, which rendered them useless for production until late in the century when electric pumps allowed the removal of water on a large scale. In addition, the political unrest impeded overland trade, as caudillos and bandits often intercepted long-distance shipments. In light of this prolonged time of troubles, it is surprising that nineteenth-century Mexico remained one nation.

THE WARS OF INDEPENDENCE, 1810-1821

Considered the father of the independence movement, Hidalgo was born in 1753, the son of an hacienda administrator. He studied Latin grammar and rhetoric in a Jesuit school until the expulsion of that order when he was fourteen years old; then he went to study arts and theology at the Real y Pontífica Universidad de México, the preeminent university of the colony. Ordained as a priest in 1778, he began a career in higher education at the College of San Nicolás in Valladolid, Michoacán, the present-day city of Morelia. At the same time his family came into money and landownership, however, Hidalgo dove headlong into trouble. As rector of San Nicolás, he drew the ire of ecclesiastical authorities due to his unorthodox and innovative teaching methods, his penchant for gambling, and the fact that he had three children with two different women. Dismissed from his post in 1792, Hidalgo became an interim curate, spending his free time reading the works of French Enlightenment authors. This was not a lucrative profession, as Hidalgo was merely filling in for a parish priest, who continued to enjoy most of the financial benefits of that office. In 1803, Hidalgo obtained the curacy of Dolores upon the death of his elder brother. He viewed this as an opportunity to become a local entrepreneur, introducing to the area new industries such as tanning, tile making, and wine producing. Just when he believed he had turned the corner financially, however, the Law of Consolidation forced immediate repayment on the mortgages he had secured to invest in these ventures. Even worse, in 1807 the Inquisition, which already kept a thick file on Hidalgo that documented his earlier transgressions, investigated him for criticizing Catholic orthodoxy and the Spanish Crown.

By then, chaos had broken out in the Spanish Empire. In 1807, Napoleon's troops had invaded Spain on their way to occupying Portugal, then an ally of Great Britain. En route, French forces seized several Spanish cities, adding to the political turmoil within the monarchy that had persisted since Charles IV's accession to the throne. In March 1808, Charles abdicated in favor of his oldest son and heir, Ferdinand VII. In hopes of consolidating his position, Ferdinand turned to Napoleon, who promptly imprisoned Ferdinand and forced his abdication. In place of Ferdinand, Napoleon named his own brother, Joseph Bonaparte, the king of Spain and its colonies. Many Spanish subjects did not accept the imposition of Joseph, and creoles throughout Spanish America pledged their loyalty to Ferdinand. In this fashion, the creoles subverted colonialism by arguing that they were subjects of the king, just like the peninsulares, and as such equal in all respects to the Spaniards. The creoles of Mexico City thus used their support of the institution of monarchy to defend the principle of popular sovereignty during meetings of a *cabildo abierto*, or open city council. In July 1808, such a cabildo abierto attended by many of the city's wealthy creole males petitioned Viceroy José de Iturrigaray—a leader hated for his ruthlessness in enforcing the Crown's attempts at revenue collection. The cabildo asked the viceroy to form a council composed of representatives of the largest cities in New Spain in order to address the void in colonial leadership. Iturrigaray hesitated but agreed to convene a meeting of notable leaders from Mexico City only. Incensed over the viceroy's concession to the creoles, the peninsulares staged a coup d'état and overthrew Iturrigaray. This coup challenged the legality of colonial administration and set a long-standing precedent by which political power derived from the force of arms rather than the law. It also brought chaos to the viceregal palace, as Iturrigaray's two successors were exceptionally weak leaders who never enjoyed any real authority. By 1810, the quarrelsome audiencia of Mexico City had assumed the functions of the viceroy.

This dual power vacuum in Madrid and in Mexico City created an opening for lesser creoles such as Hidalgo, who embraced Ferdinand as a

convenient figurehead for his own movement for greater autonomy. In 1810, Hidalgo joined a circle that included other free-thinking creoles such as Juan de Aldama, Ignacio Allende, Epigmenio González, and Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, the wife of the local corregidor who would come to be known in history as *la corregidora*. The group planned a coup d'état in the name of Ferdinand—a coup that would have broken out on December 8, 1810, if one of the conspirators had not informed the colonial authorities. On September 13, the Crown's men barged into Domínguez's house and found a large supply of weapons and ammunition. Informed by her husband, Ortiz relayed the news to Hidalgo, who—together with Aldama and Allende—decided to begin the rebellion at once.

The rebellion united Hidalgo and his creole co-conspirators, who were steeped in Enlightenment thought, with a constituency very different from them: the local campesinos and workers, who were looking to fight their way out of poverty. As a steady companion for most Mexican campesinos throughout the colonial period, poverty had greatly increased in Guanajuato and many other regions, the result of the rapid population growth in the eighteenth century. This population growth contributed to an associated rise in food prices. From the outset, the larger, uneducated, and impoverished constituency gained the upper hand, and Hidalgo's revolt found an enthusiastic reception in rural Guanajuato. Thousands of campesinos, many of them indigenous, flocked to Hidalgo's cause, and the priest suddenly and unexpectedly found himself at the head of a popular army.

To unite his disparate movement, Hidalgo embraced an important unifying symbol already alluded to in his grito. On his march toward the city of San Miguel, he picked up a banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe in a church and proclaimed her the symbol of his rebellion. By the end of that day, Hidalgo's forces had seized San Miguel, the first major town captured by the rebels. The banner of Guadalupe brought even greater popular support to the movement.

With this first victory, the priest who, unfortunately, had never received military training, began to lose his leadership over the movement. Eager to exact revenge for centuries of abuse upon the city's creole inhabitants, the motley army began to pillage San Miguel before Hidalgo's ally Allende was able to restore a semblance of order. The following day, the mob got out of control, now subjecting the city of Celaya to the type of destruction that Allende had just stopped in San Miguel. On September 28, Hidalgo's popular army approached the famous silver city of Guanajuato, one of the wealthiest cities in the Spanish Empire. The military commander of Guanajuato had

heard of the destruction in Celaya and refused to surrender the city, instead concentrating the population in his city's granary, the Alhóndiga de Granaditas. The rebels, however, would not be denied. They set the wooden door of the granary on fire, stormed the building, and killed most of the people inside. Much of the ruling class of the silver city died a cruel death that day. (One of the young boys witnessing his father's death was Lucas Alamán, who would gain fame as the preeminent conservative statesman and historian of the early independence years.) A month later, Hidalgo's forces won another decisive and bloody victory at Monte de las Cruces near Mexico City.

That victory, however, proved to be Hidalgo's last. Within striking distance of the ultimate prize—the seizure of Mexico City—the priest had second thoughts about pressing onward. He feared a repetition of the awful events in Guanajuato, which had upset him deeply. He remembered that he, too, was a creole and could not countenance the idea of a mob destroying Mexico City. Moreover, his forces had sustained heavy losses during the previous battles. Therefore, Hidalgo decided to retreat rather than press on toward the capital. As a result, the royalist forces won enough time to obtain reinforcements, and thousands of Hidalgo's troops deserted his army, disappointed at the waffling of their leader. In January 1811, the Spanish forces of General Félix Calleja devastated the rebel army. Two months later, Hidalgo was arrested and handed over to the Inquisition, which sentenced him to death by firing squad. The sentence was carried out on July 30, 1811, but only after Hidalgo had handed out candies to his executioners. Whether Hidalgo intended to show forgiveness or cement his future as a martyr is unclear. Soon thereafter, the Spaniards displayed his severed head—along with those of Aldama, Allende, and other rebel leaders—on pikes on the wall of the Alhóndiga in Guanajuato as a warning to any other would-be independence fighters.

After Hidalgo's death, the leadership of the rebels fell to another priest, José María Morelos y Pavón. Unlike Hidalgo, Morelos was a mestizo and a brilliant military strategist. Aware that the Hidalgo revolt had scared the creoles into submission to colonial rule, Morelos pursued a different strategy of insurrection. He knew that the poor majority constituted the backbone of his rebellion, and he relied on the use of guerrilla attacks, shying away from any direct engagement with Calleja's army. He was also aware of the continuing tensions between Spain and its colonists. In 1812, the Cortes de Cádiz, a government set up in Spain to oppose Joseph (the king of Spain) at a time when Napoleon's energies were concentrated on the vain enterprise of conquering Russia, promulgated a liberal constitution guaranteeing basic civil rights and equality before the law. The chaos in Spain weakened the resolve

of the royalists to defeat the insurrection, and that same year, Morelos's guerrillas in the New World managed to encircle Mexico City. At the same time, however, the constitution also gave creoles the idea that reform was possible in cooperation with Spain. In response to this challenge, Morelos demonstrated that he—unlike Hidalgo—pursued clear political goals. In September 1813, he convened the Congress of Chilpancingo, which announced the formal independence of Mexico. The Congress also adopted Mexico's first national constitution, a document that promised to redress some of the worst abuses committed against the poor majority. At a time when slavery remained legal in the United States, the Mexican delegates decreed the abolition of slavery and debt servitude. They also called for an end to the fueros, the extralegal privileges enjoyed by the Church and the army.

Yet despite his popular appeal, Morelos ultimately suffered the same fate as Hidalgo. The peninsulares and creoles, afraid of mob violence, closed ranks, preferring continued colonial rule over Morelos' rebellion, which they viewed as chaos. In 1814, Spain once again fell under Bourbon rule following the defeat of Napoleon. The newly installed King Ferdinand VII sent reinforcements to New Spain. Thus assured of royal support, General Calleja went on the offensive and broke the guerrilla's encirclement of the capital. Although Morelos managed to reconvene his supporters in Apatzingán, Michoacán, to enshrine the principles of his movement in the first national constitution of Mexico, he now witnessed the flip side of his guerrilla strategy. Without a home base controlled by his forces, he was on the run from the Crown, and in late 1815, the royalists captured him. Like Hidalgo, Morelos was tried by the Inquisition, condemned to death, and handed over to secular authorities. After his execution on December 22, 1815, his severed head joined Hidalgo's on a pike on the wall of the Alhóndiga. Among those who hunted down Morelos was a creole royalist of aristocratic provenance named Agustín de Iturbide.

For the next five years there was a prolonged stalemate between the remnants of Morelos's guerrilla and the royalist forces. The Crown could not defeat the rebels, and two new leaders—Guadalupe Victoria in Puebla and Veracruz, and Vicente Guerrero in Oaxaca—commanded formidable rebel forces. Over time, Mexicans from all walks of life grew weary of the warfare, noticing the economic effects of war. As is often the case in history, the army of occupation became increasingly unpopular, while nativist and xenophobic sentiment increased. However, neither Victoria nor Guerrero could expand their pockets of resistance, and it is likely that the stalemate would have continued if not for events in Spain. The Bourbon Ferdinand, desiring to rule in

absolutist fashion as had his ancestors, disavowed his earlier pledge to accept the liberal Constitution of 1812. In 1820, just as the king prepared to send a massive force to the Americas to suppress the revolts for independence raging not only in New Spain but also in Venezuela and Argentina, liberal army leaders in Spain staged a coup d'état that demanded Ferdinand's compliance with the constitution promulgated by the Cortes de Cádiz eight years before.

This coup changed the complexion of the war in New Spain. Creole royalists like Iturbide feared the consequences of lower-class revolts such as those witnessed under Hidalgo's and Morelos's leadership. He desired nothing more than to preserve the elitist social order in the colony. But from firsthand experience, Iturbide knew that he could not defeat Guerrero and Victoria, and he was aware that many royalist creoles had become weary of the war. Also, Iturbide had spent much of the period from 1816 to 1820 unemployed, as his reputation as an excessively cruel commander during the campaigns against the Morelos insurgency had resulted in the termination of his command over the royalist forces in Guanajuato and Valladolid. Hence, the outcry over the liberal coup in Spain gave Iturbide the perfect pretext to pay back his former employers by making common cause with the enemy.

On February 24, 1821, Iturbide and Guerrero announced the Plan of Iguala, which proclaimed Mexico's independence and postulated the new nation as a constitutional monarchy. This plan, like the many subsequent ones in the course of Mexican history, was an announcement by military leaders containing a political progam for the nation. The throne of the new nation would be offered to Ferdinand VII, one of his three sons, or any other person designated by the Mexican Cortes, or parliament. Subsequently, most attempted coups d'état would feature such a plan, usually with lofty language and promises for sweeping social and political change. Compared with later such plans, or even the proclamations of Morelos, the Plan of Iguala was modest. Designed to avoid upsetting the social structure, it contained three simple provisions: a) equal treatment under law for peninsulares and creoles; b) Catholicism as the official religion; and c) the independence of Mexico under a moderate monarchy. These provisions—*unión*, *religión*, and *independencia*—became known as the Three Guarantees, and the combined forces of Iturbide, Guerrero, and Victoria called themselves the *ejército trigarante*, or the Army of the Three Guarantees. These three guarantees are represented by the three colors on the Mexican flag. Red stands for the union of America and Europe, that is, the blood of creoles and peninsulares; white, for the purity of the Catholic faith; and green, for the hope of independence. The Trigarante

army overwhelmed the colonial authorities. On September 27, 1821, the rebels occupied Mexico City, and the viceroy and his court fled to Spain. Mexico was an independent country.

This triumph, however, bore a problematic legacy. The new rulers did not embody many of the ideals for which the rebels had shed their blood during ten years of warfare. Independence had arrived through the caprice and deception of Iturbide, a creole military leader who had made his career fighting the popular armies of Morelos and Guerrero. Iturbide's about-face and subsequent pact with the very men he had been paid to defeat set an unfortunate precedent for Mexican history. He demonstrated the primacy of opportunism and self-interest and the expediency of political principles. Against the backdrop of a devastated economy in a country that had produced less than 25 percent of the silver mined the year before the Hidalgo revolt, the political strife was ominous.

The victors of the newly independent Mexico did not share a common vision for the nation. After the American Revolution resulted in the formation of the United States, the basic form of government of the new nation—a republic with a division of power among a president, Congress, and independent judiciary—was never in doubt. The politicians of the early republic squabbled over the extent of federal versus state power as well as the terms of incorporation of any future territorial annexations. Postindependence Mexico, on the other hand, featured both monarchists and republicans. Allies of Iturbide, the former group desired to elevate a European prince to a Mexican throne. Even though they had signed on to the Plan of Iguala that declared Mexico to be a monarchy, however, Guerrero, Victoria, and others advocated a parliamentary democracy molded in accordance with the U.S. model.

The Search for Stability, 1821–1854

Independence, of course, did not guarantee lasting peace. Iturbide himself provided perhaps the greatest indicator of future trouble when he confused the new nation's interests with his own. As presiding officer of a provisional junta that governed Mexico, Iturbide instituted for himself a new military title, *Generalísimo de Tierra y Mar* (highest general of the earth and sea), as well as an annual salary in the exorbitant amount of 180,000 pesos. But even that designation and remuneration did not sufficiently flatter the general's vanity. On May 18, 1822, Iturbide's troops marched through the streets demanding his coronation as Agustín I of Mexico. After a brief moment of feigning reluctance to accept this high honor—a ritual befitting a monarch—Iturbide agreed to be

Mexico's first emperor since the Aztec ruler Cuauhtémoc. On July 21, 1822, he was coronated amidst great fanfare. His ascension to the throne signified that political rule in Mexico remained personal in nature, and that loyalty to the new emperor had substituted for the old allegiance to the Spanish Crown. It appeared that very little had changed with independence.

Iturbide's coronation flattered his ego but pleased no one else. Monarchists had desired to elevate a European prince to the Mexican throne, while republicans had remained determined to establish a parliamentary system. During his eighteen short months in power, the flamboyant and arrogant emperor alienated his supporters in Mexico City. Those farther away simply ignored or openly disavowed him: for example, in early 1823 the Central American states, which had joined Iturbide in the Plan of Iguala, broke free from Mexico. So weak was Iturbide's hold on power that the first U.S. diplomatic envoy in Mexico City, Joel R. Poinsett, openly lobbied for the U.S. annexation of vast stretches of the Mexican north without losing his accreditation. In the end, however, Poinsett was unsuccessful and returned to his native South Carolina, his only souvenir the flowery plant that still bears his name. Alarmed about the prospect of U.S. annexations, Iturbide invited English-speaking farmers to settle in Texas as long as they promised to respect Mexican law and practice Catholicism. This attempt to forge an Anglo-Catholic buffer between the United States and Mexico finalized plans that dated from the late colonial period. In fact, however, many Anglo settlers who had converted to Catholicism continued the Protestant traditions in which they had been raised.

An even greater problem for Iturbide was the deepening economic crisis following independence. The destruction of silver mining left the national currency without support. Those who could take money out of Mexico and invest it elsewhere readily did so. In addition, agricultural production had declined dramatically during the years of guerrilla warfare, and as a result, food prices rose steadily. Finally, Iturbide's army of 80,000 comprised almost 40,000 officers, whose salaries drained whatever was left in the treasury. As if these problems were not bad enough, Iturbide soured his supporters by his use of nepotism and penchant for ridiculous pomp. He not only awarded noble titles to his family, but he also decreed that the birthdays of his immediate family members be celebrated as national holidays. Like an Old World monarch, he ordered subjects who wished to see him to kneel and kiss his hand.

In the end, however, it was not pomp but repression that spelled the end of Iturbide's empire. His rule was authoritarian, and dissent was not tolerated. For example, in August 1822, the emperor discovered a conspiracy involving several distinguished creoles in Congress. In response, he arrested

its ringleaders, Fray Servando Teresa de Mier and Carlos María de Bustamante. After Congress protested against this act, Iturbide dissolved the legislature on October 31, 1822—the first of many Mexican heads of state to abolish a legislative branch that had opposed them. In refusing to respect the autonomy of Congress, Iturbide thus set a precedent that would plague Mexico for the rest of the nineteenth century. He also served as a role model for his authoritarian successors both at the national and the regional levels.

Iturbide's action elicited widespread outcry among influential creoles such as the military commander of Veracruz, a man by the name of Antonio de Padua María Severino López de Santa Anna y Pérez de Lebrón. The name was a mouthful, and most Mexicans knew him simply as "Santa Anna," their most influential leader during the three decades following independence. Born in Jalapa, Veracruz, in 1794 to Spanish parents, Santa Anna had begun his career in the army in 1810 and served with the royalist forces until 1821, when he proclaimed his adherence to the Plan of Iguala. By that time, he had become a successful land- and businessowner in the Jalapa region of Veracruz, and he commanded a private army that controlled that strategically important region located along the route from the port of Veracruz to Mexico City. An opportunist par excellence, Santa Anna always anticipated the shifting political winds. Thus he decided that Iturbide's days in power were numbered, and on December 1, 1822, Santa Anna proclaimed Mexico a republic in his Plan de Veracruz. Soon thereafter, Guerrero and Victoria joined this plan, and the spreading revolt forced Iturbide to step down from his throne. In March 1823, the rebels took Mexico City to the jubilant acclaim of the city's inhabitants, and Mexico became a republic. Guadalupe Victoria and two of his closest associates formed a three-man junta until a president could be elected.

Nonetheless, this victory did not end the strife. As their first significant act in office, Victoria and his allies charged a constituent assembly with the task of drafting a federal constitution. The convention met for the first time on November 27, and within a few days, delegates had divided into two hostile camps. A Centralist faction coalesced around Mier and Bustamante, the leaders of the congressional opposition to Iturbide. Seeing themselves as the heirs of Hispanic political traditions, the Centralists advocated a strong central government and a significant political role of the Catholic Church. Their rivals were the Federalists around Victoria who drew their political lessons from the example of the United States. Desiring to emulate Anglo American political traditions, the Federalists wanted a weak central government, strong, autonomous states, and an end to the privileges of the Church. Ultimately,

the Federalists prevailed on issues of political organization, and the Constitution of 1824 largely resembled its U.S. counterpart with a system of shared government and a bicameral Congress. Nonetheless, the Centralists emerged victorious on three significant issues: Catholicism remained the state religion; the president could invoke special executive powers in case of an emergency; and the colonial fueros remained (special privileges that allowed members of the clergy and army to stand trial in separate courts). It was an explosive compromise that satisfied no one, and the convention had exposed the principal political fault lines of the early republic.

An Anglo American political system such as the one reflected in the Constitution of 1824 faced daunting obstacles in a socially, regionally, and ethnically divided Mexico. The decade of fighting had destroyed an incipient large-scale distribution network of goods, people, and ideas, and Mexicans were more isolated from each other than they had been in the late colonial period. Outside the capital, most Mexicans expressed allegiance to their region rather than their nation, especially since the social and political order of that nation safeguarded the interests of the privileged classes in the capital. Mexico remained a rural country, and over a third of the population was indigenous. Most of the indigenous people lived in small villages, or *pueblos*, having limited contact with surrounding areas. Rural towns featured a mix of indigenous people and mestizos. The inhabitants of these towns felt the authority of the central government only in negative ways, such as by taxation and the much-feared *leva*, or military draft. Only in Mexico City and other large cities did observers find any sense of national identity, and even within those cities, sharp social distinctions divided the rich from the poor. Urban Mexicans thought in terms of three different social classes. The *gente alta*, the "high people," or elite, consisted of the property owners. The *gente decente*, the "decent people," or middle class, included both professionals and artisans. Finally, the *gente humilde*, the "humble people," or poor, included the urban workers and beggars. A derogatory term widely used to describe the beggars was *léperos*, or lepers. Class identity had strong cultural elements: while the gente alta pursued a formal education and aspired to mimic European ways, the gente humilde engaged in an everyday struggle for survival. Like the vast majority of rural inhabitants (and almost all women), the urban poor remained illiterate. Thus, when Mexican politicians wrote lofty programs and political plans, they addressed a tiny, wealthy, urban, and almost exclusively male audience.

To make matters worse, foreigners continued to play important roles in nineteenth-century Mexico. To be sure, Spanish colonial rule had ended with

the triumph of Iturbide. But at least initially, the peninsulares continued to control petty commerce, and Spanish priests occupied important positions in the Church hierarchy. British banks held much of the nation's foreign debt, and European merchants—especially Spanish, British, and French traders—dominated wholesale commerce, particularly in the imported clothes and luxury items craved by the gente alta and the gente decente.

In light of these divisions, it is not surprising that clientelist relationships trumped political ideas and partisanship. Clientelism denotes the practice of using ties of family, marriage, and friendship to forge important economic and political networks. In Mexico, as in the rest of Latin America, caudillos (regional military leaders), had emerged during the Wars of Independence. With the help of military forces at their personal command, these caudillos vied for power after the disintegration of Spanish colonial rule. Their power rested on charisma and personal alliances in which the caudillos promised a material benefit to their followers (clients), who reciprocated by pledging loyalty to their leader. In turn, the allies of the caudillo passed on some of this material benefit to their own clients, again in exchange for their loyalty and support. Many of these followers were called caciques, or local bosses, a term used in adaptation of the Náhuatl word for a village chief. The caciques often, but not always, held formal political offices such as that of mayor or *jefe político*. On the national scene, the caudillos viewed the Centralist and Federalist factions as mere vehicles for their ambitions, and many of them easily changed political affiliation.

Among the first generation of political leaders of the new republic, some of the foremost caudillos were Santa Anna and Vicente Guerrero, relatively uneducated military leaders who enjoyed large personal followings. Another important caudillo, Juan Alvarez, ruled virtually unchallenged over southern Mexico for more than five decades. All three of these caudillos had large followings in their regions—followings that accepted the mandates of their caudillos over those of the federal government. The trouble for the first president of republican Mexico, Guadalupe Victoria, was that the caudillos did not respect the newly created political institutions. In their minds, it was they who had won independence on the battlefield, and they were not about to be subordinated by city slickers under the guise of parliamentary procedures. As Victoria found out, Santa Anna was a particularly significant adversary. His appeal stemmed from his military stature, but also from his success as a business- and landowner. In addition, the caudillo of Veracruz also found adherents as the embodiment of antipolitics—someone who wanted nothing to do with Centralists, Federalists, and well-dressed, bureaucratic politicians from the city

in general. In that fashion, Santa Anna resembled South American caudillos such as José Antonio Páez of Venezuela and Juan Manuel de Rosas of Argentina. Thus Victoria confronted the same political and economic problems that had proven Iturbide's undoing, and the president never exerted effective control over most of the national territory. In 1827, his vice president, Nicolás Bravo, staged an unsuccessful coup against him, and the following year his own party demonstrated its lack of respect for democracy when it refused to recognize the triumph of the opposition in the presidential elections. Aided by Santa Anna, they imposed Guerrero as the second president of Mexico. With Guerrero, the caudillos had reached the presidency.

Guerrero had hardly uttered the oath of office when he learned that Spain had launched an attempt to repossess its former colony. In July 1829—one year after the remainder of Spanish South America had attained independence—General Isidro Barradas launched an invasion from Cuba, one of the three last Spanish colonies in the Americas along with the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Barradas' forces seized the northeastern port town of Tampico but got no further. In August, Santa Anna's forces laid siege to Tampico and took the city two months later. Afraid of reprisals, most of the remaining Spaniards fled Mexico after the failed invasion. With this exodus, the majority of all retail merchants had left the country. British, French, and German traders filled the gap in wholesale commerce, accentuating Mexico's dependence on what would be the rising European industrial powers of the nineteenth century. The Spanish exodus also capped a decade of capital flight that left the government starved of significant sources of revenue until the rebuilding of the mining economy in the 1880s.

The Spanish invasion inaugurated the heyday of Santa Anna. In the words of Lucas Alamán, one of the survivors of Hidalgo's assault on the Alhóndiga and a foremost politician of this era, postindependence Mexican political history was the history of Santa Anna's revolutions. As the linchpin of both the anti-Iturbide alliance and the coup that elevated Guerrero to the presidency, Santa Anna emerged as the most important leader of the new republic, and he soon demonstrated his ability to transcend the Centralist/Federalist conflict by his own, extensive clientelist network. He had an uncanny ability to portray himself as the defender of his fatherland. His role in repelling the Spanish attempt at reconquest earned him the reputation of a defender of national sovereignty. In 1832, he allied with the Federalists in a successful coup against President Anastasio Bustamante and became president (for the first time) on May 16, 1833, serving just eighteen days until June 3, 1833, when he stepped aside in favor of Vice President Valentín Gómez Farías, a radical Liberal who

desired to end all privileges of the Church and army in Mexico. Just a few months later, Gómez Farías's anticlerical reforms led Santa Anna to reverse his stance and return to the presidency in alliance with the Centralists. Thus began a pattern in which Santa Anna occupied and relinquished the presidency eleven times; his longest term was his last, which lasted almost twenty-eight months (April 1853–August 1855). Most of the time, he enjoyed his role as a power behind the scenes who came to the fore whenever he believed the nation needed him. For example, in 1836; he gained fame in leading Mexican troops at the battle of the Alamo during the war that led to the independence of Texas. Two years later, in 1838, he coordinated the defense of Mexico against a French invasion force sent to collect debts owed to French residents, including a baker in Mexico City who had once lost his pastries to a marauding mob. During what French journalists later dubbed the Pastry War, Santa Anna lost his left leg to a cannon shot, and in 1842, astonishingly, he gave his leg a state burial with a twelve-gun salute. Even more bizarre, two years later, one of Santa Anna's many presidencies ended in a coup that resulted in the victors digging out his leg from its mausoleum and waving it through the streets.

Although many historians have attributed Santa Anna's success to the chaos of the postindependence decades, his ability to dominate Mexican politics over a period of twenty-five years requires a different explanation. In fact, opportunism alone could not have guided a leader through a political universe ordered by chaos; hence, historian Frank Tannenbaum's assessment of Santa Anna as "the evil genius of Mexico's destiny" misses its mark. Instead, Mexicans repeatedly called upon Santa Anna's leadership because there was no one else, and because the caudillo vowed to defend the interests of the propertied classes even as he opposed and ridiculed their intellectual representatives. Santa Anna was steadfast in both his support of the social order and in his folksy defense of antipolitics. He also personified Mexican nationalism: as evidenced by his role in defeating the Spanish attempt at reconquest as well as numerous acts of bravery and military successes against enemies both domestic and foreign.

Despite Santa Anna's efforts to unify the nation, he and other Mexican leaders could not prevent U.S. land grabbing. In 1835, Santa Anna abrogated the Constitution of 1824 and imposed Centralist rule upon Mexico, the "Seven Laws" that antagonized many inhabitants of the distant frontier. The abrogation of the constitution gave the Anglo American settlers in Texas an opportunity they had long been looking for, and under the leadership of Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston, they took up arms under the banner of independence following the devastating defeat of Santa Anna's army at San

Jacinto, the Texans easily triumphed over the Mexican forces. In 1836, the "Lone Star Republic" was born, and eight years later Texas was admitted to the Union. The U.S. annexation of Texas in 1845 sparked one of the many instances in which Santa Anna left the presidency, overthrown by a coup d'état that ended with him in exile.

Disputes over the Texas-Mexico border, in particular the question of whether the Rio Grande or the Nueces River formed the proper boundary, resulted in further complications with the United States. The issue was not a small one, as the U.S. claim doubled the size of Texas to include not only San Antonio but also Albuquerque, the present state capital of New Mexico. To enforce this claim, U.S. President James K. Polk sent envoy John Slidell to negotiate with the Mexican government. Slidell carried instructions to secure the border claimed by the Texans, as well as to make an offer to buy California and the rest of New Mexico for a grand total of $30 million. Confident that its army, which matched the U.S. military forces in size, would repel an invasion, the Mexican government sent Slidell packing. Polk's response was to send a U.S. contingent under General Zachary Taylor across the Nueces River at Corpus Christi. After Mexican troops killed several of Taylor's troops, the U.S. Congress declared war. Thereafter, Taylor's army slowly wound its way south, occupying the strategically significant city of Monterrey and taking control over the northeast. Farther west, U.S. forces scored easy victories and reached the city of Chihuahua and the Pacific coast at San Diego. The shocking course of the war revealed the ineptitude of the Mexican army, as its commanders were far more interested in battling for the presidency than in repelling the invaders. It was time, once again, for Santa Anna to save the nation. In 1846, he reassumed the presidency.

The worst, however, was yet to come. Near Saltillo, Coahuila, Santa Anna failed to dislodge the U.S. forces in February 1847, and three weeks later General Winfield Scott's Army of Occupation landed near Veracruz and invaded the heartland from the same direction that had brought Cortés success more than three hundred years earlier. On September 13, Scott's troops occupied the capital. The last stand came on Chapultepec Hill, where six Mexican cadets, still remembered as the *niños héroes*, or boy heroes, fell to their deaths rather than surrender to the North Americans, also known to Mexicans as *gringos*. Except for some guerrilla warfare in Veracruz, the war had ended. On February 2, 1848, the Mexican government signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in which the nation ceded half of its territory to the United States, including the present-day states of California, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico as well as parts of Colorado, Texas, and Utah. The war with the United States

marked an important turning point in ways other than these tremendous territorial losses, which involved vast, if sparsely populated, areas. The invasion also brought many Mexicans living in the ceded lands into first-time contact with the people and culture of the United States, and particularly the Protestant religions, Anglo American food, and industrially manufactured products. Finally, U.S. land grabbing in the north served as a clarion call to all Mexican leaders to set aside their differences. The defeat left a deep wound in the hearts of nationalists, and many political leaders vowed never again to let foreigners exploit internal dissensions for their own benefit.

Events in the southeast—and particularly the Yucatán peninsula—sounded an equally dire warning. In 1847, even as Mexico waged war with the United States, Yucatán's Maya campesinos revolted against the white elite in the largest and most serious regional uprising in modern Mexican history. As had happened before, squabbles among the elite created an opening for an oppressed group to express its grievances. Dubbed the Caste War, the revolt brought the Maya troops to the cusp of conquering the Yucatán state capital of Mérida. The state government regrouped and defeated the rebels, who finally sought refuge in the peninsula's abundant woods and shrublands, where they continued to organize under the banner of Chan Santa Cruz, or the Cult of the Speaking Cross. It was not until the Mexican Revolution that government forces finally crushed the rebellion, although isolated fighting continued into the 1930s. Along with the Yaquis in Sonora, who fought a virtually endless series of wars to keep their land and autonomy until their defeat in the late phases of the Mexican Revolution, Maya resistance proved one of the most successful and persistent indigenous challenges to central authority.

This example not only showed the strength of indigenous resistance, but it also demonstrated the regional character of Mexican history. As mentioned, most of Mexico's inhabitants professed local and regional rather than national allegiances. Indeed, a silver lining of the war with the United States might have been the fact that the conflict constituted a significant turning point in the emergence of a Mexican national consciousness. The lost war prompted a majority of propertied Mexicans to agree on a common front vis-à-vis the U.S. invasion force. They knew that Texas and all points west were lost forever, but they hoped to maintain the Mexican heartland under the authority of the federal government.

As a result, the Mexican elites broadly agreed on the need for some form of central government control. By the 1840s, the debate between Centralists and Federalists had shifted to one between the underlying political tendencies of both movements, Conservatism and Liberalism. For the most part, the Conservatives held many of the views of the former Centralists, and the

Liberals, many of those of the former Federalists, but there had been plenty of exceptions to this rule. The new conflict involved factions that were ideologically aligned to a greater extent than the Centralists and Federalists had been. Taking their cue from the progenitor of their movement, the statesman and historian Lucas Alamán, Conservatives clung to Catholic tradition, a social hierarchy, and limited engagement with the outside world. They desired to protect the socioeconomic order inherited from the colonial period and preserve the privileges of the Church and army. The Liberals, following the lead of two early Mexican Liberals, Valentín Gómez Farías and José María Luis Mora, desired to follow the example of the American and French revolutions in abolishing the fueros and all other special legal privileges, and they advocated democratic reforms to guarantee individual liberties. Unlike the Conservatives, the Liberals were split into two camps: the *puros*, or radical Liberals, who wanted to emulate the free-market capitalism and parliamentary democracy of the United States and to break the influence of the Church in order to bring Mexico into the modern world; and the *moderados*, or moderates, who feared popular uprisings and wished to retain the social hierarchy and some aspects of authoritarian rule.

Reform, Civil War, and French Intervention, 1854–1867

All Liberals, whether puros or moderados, agreed on the definitive removal of Santa Anna from the politics of their nation. In 1854—just after Santa Anna had sold off a strip of Sonora to the United States in the Gadsden Purchase—they got their chance, as the long-time caudillo of the South, Juan Alvarez, joined their cause. On March 1, Colonel Florencio Villarreal proclaimed the Plan of Ayutla in the city of the same name in Guerrero. It not only proclaimed the intention to end the rule of Santa Anna once and for all, but also called for a constituent assembly to write a new constitution. A new generation of Liberal leaders supported the plan: among them were the creoles Ignacio Comonfort and Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, Melchor Ocampo, who had studied in Europe for many years, and the Zapotec Indian Benito Juárez. It took seventeen months for the Liberals to reach their goal. On August 8, 1855, Santa Anna resigned the presidency for the eleventh and final time, and Alvarez briefly became president before giving way to the moderado Comonfort.

Among the Liberal victors, none was more important than Benito Juárez. A Zapotec, Juárez was born in 1806 in the village of Guelatao, Oaxaca, into a poor family. He became an orphan as a three-year-old and worked as a

shepherd at a very young age to sustain himself. At twelve years of age, he walked forty-one miles to the city of Oaxaca and began an apprenticeship as a printer. It was only then that Juárez learned Spanish, and he soon realized that the way up was through obtaining a formal education. After a brief stint studying in a seminary, Juárez studied law. Highly intelligent and articulate, he became the first attorney to receive official certification in the state of Oaxaca. He began his political career at the age of twenty-six, when he was elected to the Oaxaca city council, but returned to the practice of law, where he distinguished himself in defending a village against its local priest. He became a man of means, which enabled him to marry a white woman, Margarita Maza, the daughter of Italian immigrants. He returned to politics, and in 1848 he won election as governor of his home state—the first indigenous Mexican ever elected to a governorship. During Santa Anna's last term in office, the caudillo had Juárez arrested and escorted to Veracruz, where the Oaxacan departed for exile in New Orleans. From Louisiana, Juárez plotted the overthrow of Santa Anna and secured Alvarez's support as well as the provision of arms and money to the rebels. Therefore, he played a crucial role in the victory of the Liberals in 1855.

Thus began the Liberal *Reforma*, a vast experiment to modernize Mexico along the lines of Great Britain and the United States. Even though the moderado Comonfort was president, it was puros such as Juárez and Lerdo de Tejada who took the lead in writing the most significant reform laws of the era. Juárez and Lerdo desired a capitalist, democratic, and secular nation in which individuals were equal before the law. In such a society, they believed, both the rich and the poor would compete for power on equal terms, free from the odious ethnic and professional distinctions created by the fueros, which allowed the clergy and members of the military to avoid trial in civil courts. The very first reform law, the Ley Juárez of 1855, restricted the fueros to violations of ecclesiastical and military law. The other reform laws entailed a direct attack on the Catholic Church. Authored by another puro Liberal, the Ley Lerdo barred what it labeled "corporations"—chiefly Church institutions and local governments—from owning land and real estate not essential to running their everyday operations. The law decreed that most of the vast landholdings of the Church would be auctioned off to private citizens. Liberals were not thinking, however, of providing landless campesinos with a plot to call their own; instead, they intended to foster private landownership in Mexico, with the lands going to the highest bidder. President Comonfort also approved a law giving the state—rather than the Church—the power to register births, marriages, and deaths. This law took away one of the principal sources of

revenue of the Church. Finally, the new Constitution of 1857 codified these laws and created a parliamentary system in which the president would have to share power with a single legislature. Mexico, as the framers of this document believed, needed safeguards against dictatorship, and the Liberals hoped that the new document would prevent the emergence of a new strongman leader such as Santa Anna. The new constitution also omitted any mention of Catholicism as the state church, although it did not expressly safeguard freedom of religion, either. Neither the Church nor the Conservatives could accept this new state of things. From distant Rome, Pope Pius IX denounced the constitution. He and the Conservatives found help from the Mexican military, which—just like the Church—had lost important privileges through the reform laws. In 1858, General Félix Zuloaga pronounced himself in rebellion against Comonfort, jailed Juárez, the next in line for the presidency, and dissolved Congress.

Zuloaga's coup plunged Mexico into a most devastating civil war, the War of the Reform (1858–61). While the army proclaimed Zuloaga president, Juárez escaped to Querétaro, where he was named president by his Liberal allies as the first and only indigenous Mexican to occupy the country's highest office. The two national governments then went to war to determine national supremacy and the fate of the reform. The three-year war that ensued defied easy ideological or political categorization. For example, indigenous people fought on both sides of the conflict. Some of those who sided with the Liberals did so out of conviction that an open political system would provide them with more opportunities to express their grievances, and others admired Juárez. Other indigenous Mexicans such as the cacique Tomás Mejía supported the Conservatives because they feared that the Ley Lerdo might not just disentail the lands of the Church, but those of indigenous villages as well. Yet others followed the lead of the Conservative Party because they had been threatened or intimidated by the Church. Likewise, creoles and mestizos, city dwellers and country people, could be found on both sides of the conflict. After three years, the Liberals finally won a decisive defeat under General Ignacio Zaragoza. At the cost of tens of thousands of lives, it appeared that the advocates of reform had prevailed.

Yet a military victory such as this one could not breach the deep divide manifested by the Conservative-Liberal conflict—a divide that transcended the conflict between political factions dominated by the gente alta and decente to include the lower classes. The Liberal attack on the Church not only provoked the wrath of the Church hierarchy and other defenders of traditional privilege, but also the opposition of popular Catholicism. One example of

the way traditional Catholics understood the conflict was through the cult of Madre Matiana, a sixteenth-century nun said to have been plagued by terrifying visions of a Satanic plot to throw the nation into turmoil by means of a constitution, an egalitarian legal code, and the establishment of legislative rule. According to nineteenth-century Catholic pamphlets, Matiana prophesied the incursion of U.S. armies, civil war, and the expropriation of Church property. These pamphlets ascribed to Matiana the role of a visionary who anticipated the chaos and violence of nineteenth-century Mexico. On the other side of the debate, the Liberals viewed the Catholic Church as the primary obstacle toward the establishment of a capitalist and democratic society like the United States. Popular liberalism also viewed the Church as a foreign-controlled institution that purposefully kept millions of Mexicans in ignorance and poverty. Liberals believed the Church to be the last holdover of Spanish rule, an institution that kept Mexico repeating colonial patterns.

Hopes for peace thus proved ephemeral. The Liberals bickered over the treatment of their enemies, and President Juárez confronted a Congress that took its charge to check executive power seriously. Mexico was also in a deep financial crisis. Due to the war, the government had not paid its civil servants or police for three years. The country's infrastructure lagged decades behind that of many other Latin American countries. While investors in the United States strung together a network of railroads that soon connected the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts, not a single serviceable railroad line existed in Mexico that linked two major cities. A typical journey from Mexico City to Veracruz took at least three days, and several weeks in the rainy season. The government was also deeply in debt to its creditors from France, Great Britain, and Spain and besieged by claims from private citizens from these nations who had suffered losses during the War of Reform. On October 31, 1861, delegates from the creditor nations agreed to collect on these debts in the Convention of London. The terms of the agreement stipulated the occupation by forces of the three signatory powers of both coasts and forced debt collection by means of seizing the customs house of Veracruz. But the French Emperor Napoleon III had even more ambitious plans. He desired to establish a virtual French colony in the Americas. When the British and Spanish officers in Veracruz realized the scope of these ambitions, they sent their troops home; their departure left Napoleon's troops alone to carry out their leader's grandiose plans for conquest.

Less than a month after Queen Victoria of England and Queen Isabella II of Spain withdrew their forces from the Mexican coasts, more than six thousand French troops marched inland. Aware of the success of General Scott's

army just sixteen years before, the French did not expect much resistance; and they were encouraged by the fact that both the Conservatives and the Church supported the invasion. But on May 5, 1862, Zaragoza's soldiers defeated the invaders in the Battle of Puebla, a victory still celebrated each year during the Cinco de Mayo festivities. Among the Mexican officers distinguishing themselves in the battle was a young mestizo from Oaxaca, Brigadier General Porfirio Díaz, who would become Mexico's longest-serving ruler later in the century. But the Mexican triumph was short-lived. Aided by more than thirty thousand reinforcements, the French regrouped and laid siege to Puebla in March 1863. The city fell after two months, and in late May, Juárez gave up Mexico City without a fight. While Juárez and his cabinet evacuated to San Luis Potosí, the French seized the capital and named a provisional government consisting of thirty-five Conservative notables, including several former allies of Santa Anna. The French had found domestic allies to support their occupation and hunkered down for what they believed would be a long-term presence in Mexico.

But this was only an intermediate step to Napoleon's larger goal: the naming of a European monarch as Emperor of Mexico, a monarch who would rule by the force of French arms. He found his man in Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Austria, the younger brother of Emperor Franz Joseph I. Maximilian readily assented provided that a plebiscite would validate his reign. This condition indicated that the future emperor would not always do the bidding of his Conservative and French backers. Although the plebiscite administered by the French army confirmed Maximilian in his new office, he had served notice that he, like Juárez and the other Liberals, valued the principle of popular sovereignty. But he also knew who his master was. In the Convention of Miramar, Maximilian accepted the throne and promised to reimburse Napoleon for the costs of the military occupation, including the wages of the French troops while in Mexico. He also guaranteed the payment of all French claims in full.

In late May 1864, Maximilian and his wife Charlotte (known to Mexicans as Carlota) arrived in Veracruz aboard an Austrian vessel. They brought with them all the accouterments of a European court: furniture, china, servants, cooks, bureaucrats, and even two ladies-in-waiting. Hot and humid Veracruz, however, offered a rude awakening to the realities of a very different region of the world from the one Maximilian and Carlota had left. Upon viewing the dilapidated port facilities, the royal couple realized the enormous task of achieving economic development in a country that had seen more than half a century of political unrest and economic stagnation. In Mexico, yellow fever

plagued the coast, striking down thousands of people each year. Black vultures hovered over the town, ready to pick at moldering carcasses in the streets. The welcome party sent to greet the monarchs arrived late, and the journey to Mexico City took several days. The railroad ended in a tiny village in the Sierra Madre, whence stagecoaches brought the royal party to the capital. Once there, the couple felt more at home, as the cool mountain air of Mexico City was much more to their liking. Maximilian and Carlota installed themselves in lofty Chapultepec Castle, the residence of Mexican presidents.

Maximilian's rule contributed to the growth of foreign cultural influence. The French brought their cuisine to Mexico, and the Austrians their pastry. French thought already molded the worldview of the elite in Mexico City, and the French and Austrian presence gave further impetus to those ideas. The Austrian polka left its imprint in the waltz rhythms and brass instrumentation of *ranchera* music, and French soldiers left their genetic imprint in the provinces such as Los Altos, Jalisco, in the form of their children from mixed unions. But just as the new emperor advanced the Europeanization of Mexico, so did Maximilian endeavor to make himself Mexican. Upon entering Mexico City, he made his first stop at the Basílica de Guadalupe, a gesture designed to appeal to both the Church and the indigenous and mestizo majority. Maximilian also opened his palace to the public once a week; he spent a lot of time wandering around in marketplaces; he ate Mexican food; and he sometimes even wore indigenous garments. According to French military officer Charles Blanchot, Maximilian visited indigenous communities in order to relieve a tortured soul that was taxed beyond its limits by the task of governing Mexico: "When his state of irritation became too acute, and when the burden of his job seemed too heavy, His Majesty would go on a little trip. Amidst the ovations of the poor, morose Indians, he found relief and pleasure, as he considered himself adored by his subjects."

While the blond and blue-eyed Maximilian's efforts to Mexicanize himself produced bemusement among both the French occupation army and the Mexico City elite, his policies engendered controversy. To the consternation of his Conservative allies, Maximilian issued a series of decrees reminiscent of Liberal policies. Assisted by Mexican advisers steeped in modern French thought, a group dubbed *los imperialistas*, he decreed freedom of the press and the abolition of debt peonage. The new emperor did not treat the Church much differently than had Juárez. He refused to reinstate lands lost during the Reforma, and he even imposed several forced loans on the Church. A Freemason, Maximilian held views more in line with those of the Liberals than those of the Conservatives. The Liberals, however, refused to come to

terms with the emperor. From their point of view, Maximilian was a usurper, a foreign ruler imposed by an army of occupation. Driven back all the way to the U.S. border near El Paso, Texas, Juárez and his allies realized that a Mexican Empire was not viable in the long run and drew nationalist credentials from their rejection of Maximilian and the French occupation. They knew that U.S. President Abraham Lincoln could not but reject Maximilian on the grounds of the Monroe Doctrine, which denounced the establishment of new European colonies in the Americas. In 1865, the victory of the Union over the Confederacy in the U.S. Civil War assured Juárez of U.S. military support, as Lincoln wasted no time pressuring Napoleon to withdraw his forces from Mexico. Tired of an occupation that had become increasingly expensive and ineffective, Napoleon began to remove French soldiers in late 1866 and early 1867. The Lincoln administration also allowed the Juaristas to purchase arms in the United States.

In the end, these three factors—Liberal nationalism, the position of the United States, and the French withdrawal—doomed Maximilian's empire. In the spring of 1866, the Juaristas seized the offensive and occupied the strategic northern cities of Chihuahua, Monterrey, and Matamoros. During the remainder of the year, the Liberals seized the rest of the north as well as Guadalajara and Oaxaca and encircled Maximilian in central Mexico. The end came in June 1867, when the Juaristas captured Maximilian in the city of Querétaro. Mindful of the fact that the emperor had ordered the execution of all captured Liberal commanders at the height of his power in 1865, Juárez had Maximilian court-martialed and sentenced to death. On the morning of June 19, 1867, a firing squad executed Maximilian and some of his closest Mexican allies on a hill outside Querétaro.

The executions sent a message that Mexico was a sovereign nation, but they also served up an eerie reminder that being a Mexican head of state was a hazardous profession. Sovereignty had come at a terrible price: at least 50,000 casualties in the last war alone, decades of political strife, economic crisis, and foreign intervention accompanied by the loss of half of the country's territory. But this hard-won sovereignty had only heightened the sense that Mexico needed a strong central government and a series of reforms to survive. It fell to Juárez and his allies to oversee the resulting process of Liberal modernization intended to make Mexico, at last, a nation equal to the invaders that had plagued its first decades of existence as an independent country.