

Mexican Independence Day

VS

Cinco de Mayo

by Claudine Zap

September 16 is the anniversary of Mexican Independence Day. But put away your guacamole hat. It's not that holiday. Let us explain.

Mexican Independence Day has serious roots. It marks the day in 1810 when the Catholic priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla called for the people of Mexico to rise up against Spanish rule, which led to a 10-year war to break with the monarchy. We of the former British colonies can certainly relate.

The day is marked Hidalgo-style with the ringing of church bells and "*el grito*," the cry of independence, in town squares across the country. Celebrations will be kicked off by the Mexican President shouting "Viva Mexico" around midnight at the Zócalo in Mexico City, one of the largest public plazas in the world. A day of parades and public celebrations follows.

But you'll notice it's in September. In America, aside from parades like the one held in East Los Angeles, the big day in Mexico is not noticed in the U.S. We like to get excited about *Cinco de Mayo*, the fifth of May, known to many as the day of margaritas and merrymaking — and not observed by Mexico at all. It's not even an official Mexican holiday. But maybe the U.S. should adopt it: The day commemorates Mexico's underdog victory over French troops led by Emperor Napoleon III — who detested the U.S., by the way — at the Battle of Puebla in 1862. And hey, who wouldn't want to celebrate that?

So mark your calendar for May 5, but remember to give a "Viva Mexico!" shout-out for Mexican independence on September 16.