

The Napoleon Series

Spanish Royal Decree of 1817 Pertaining to Spanish Government during the French Occupation

By [Christopher Coffey](#)

After Napoleon's forces invaded Spain in Early 1808 and kidnapped King Ferdinand 7th and his Father King Charles 4th, Spain was left without a governing body. Spain was predominantly occupied. There was no active central government and cities relied on their local Junta's. On 25 June 1809, the first centralized Government to arise from the ashes was the Supreme Junta Central Government, which was ordered by Royal Decree, 25 September 1808, which also discussed the invasion of Madrid by French forces. On 29 January 1810, the Supreme Junta Central Government was dissolved and the Council of Regency was established as per the 24 February 1810 Royal Decree. The Council of Regency was comprised of predominantly liberal members that wanted to limit the authority of the King and give power to the people.

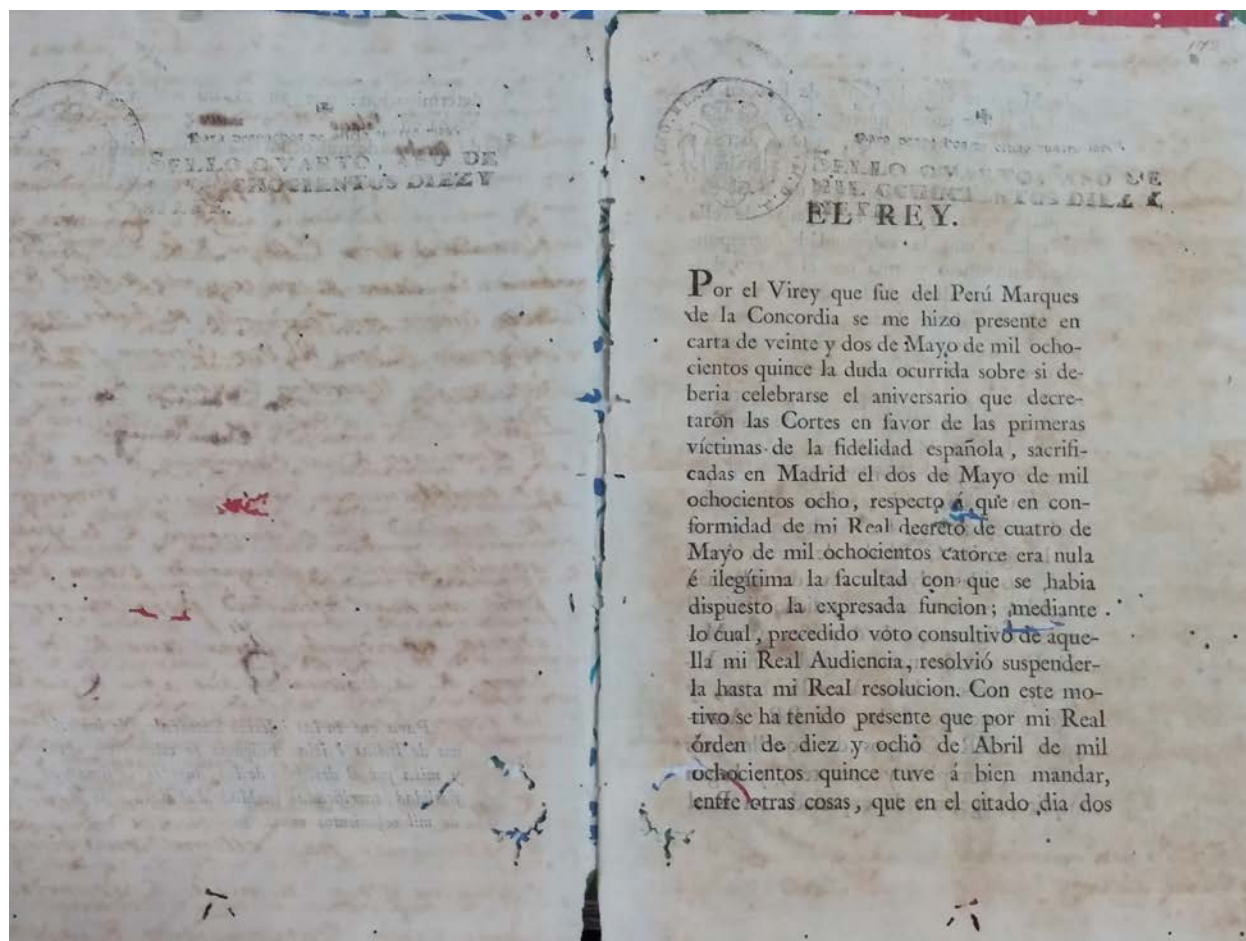
In 1810, another body of Government was created, The Cadiz Cortes, which was the first national assembly of Spain. It had members from every colony and included the Catholic Church. It was named so because during the French invasion Spain lost many of its strongholds for the Government and the last stop was Cadiz. There were several attempts to capture Cadiz, but it never fell. On 19 March 1812, the Cadiz Cortes created and disseminated one of the most important and controversial pieces in Spanish history, Spain's first constitution, dubbed "La Pepa" which severely limited the King's power and greatly increased every Spaniard's rights.

What they did not foresee was this document would be a major catalyst in the downfall of the Spanish Empire. When Napoleon forcefully put his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne it split the empire. Many of the politicians in Madrid and other areas tried to conform and work with the French rule. There were even coins minted in mainland Spain during this time that bore Joseph's bust on the obverse; however, the coins minted in the colonies bore the bust of King Ferdinand 7th.

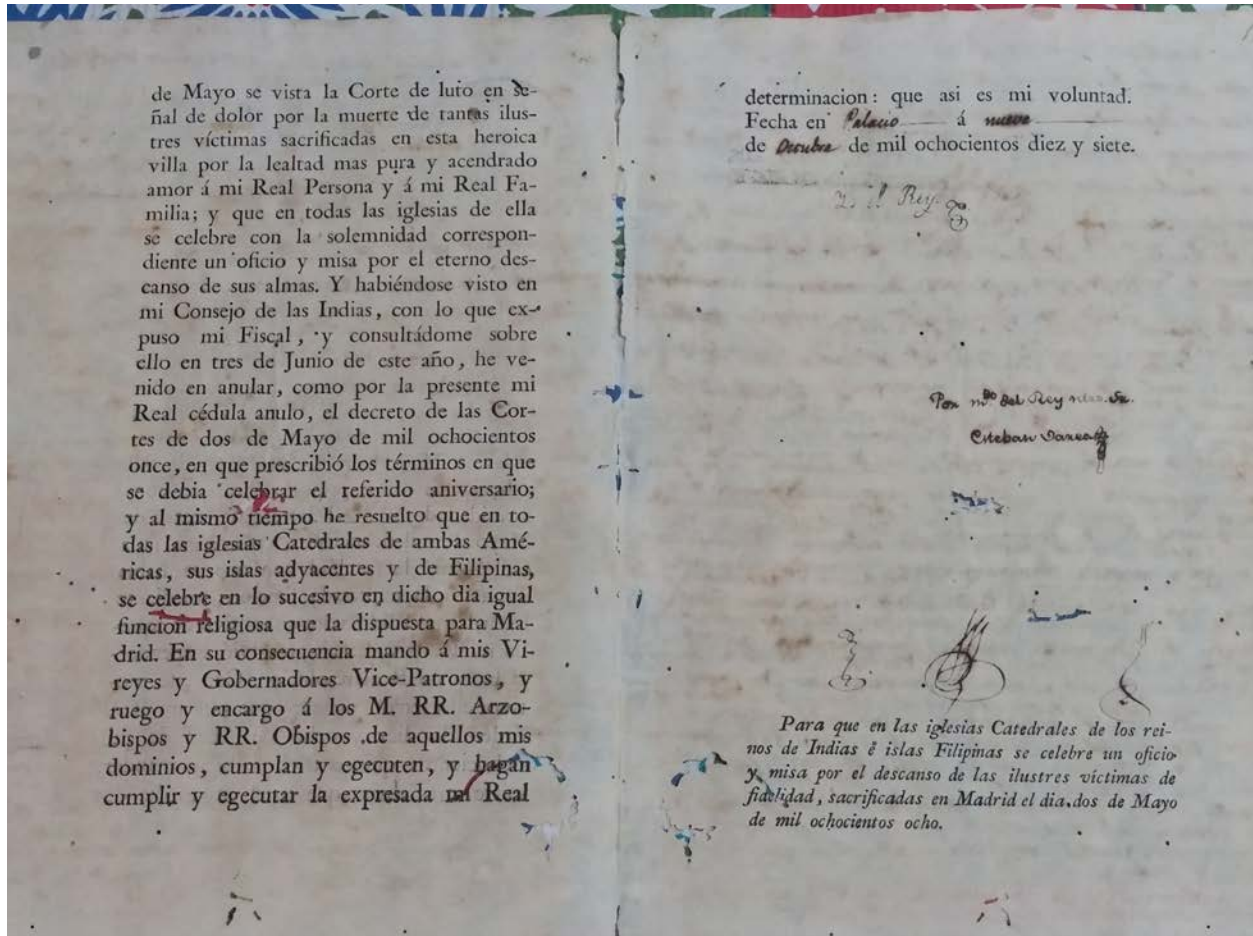
At the end of the war Napoleon freed King Ferdinand and before he was allowed to return to Spain as its King, he was forced by the governing body to agree to uphold the 1812 Constitution in whole. Ferdinand 7th reluctantly agreed and returned to power as King. In a short time after returning Ferdinand was counseled by many loyal nobles who also had lost power due to the constitution and was swayed to realize this constitution had taken away his God given rights and powers.

On 24 March 1814, King Ferdinand 7th officially abolished the constitution which had a short life considering much of the two years a large area of Spain was occupied by French forces and never fully enjoyed its freedoms. King Ferdinand 7th also arrested and imprisoned or exiled many of the liberal members of the occupation governments for the harm they did to his monarchy. This was not the end of the liberals as they kept after a constitution for the rest of King Ferdinand 7th's reign.

The real problem was the colonies had learned of freedom and self-rule while the King was disposed. The creation of the constitution caused many revolts and successions to ensue. Between 1810 and 1820, Spain lost almost all of its colonies to the French Invasion, mismanagement, and freedom revolts. A period of almost 5 years without a King crippled Spain's economy not to mention the damage to mainland Spain by the war and occupation forces. Spain would never rise again to become a world power.



The Spanish Royal Decree of 1817 (from the Author's Collection)



de Mayo se vista la Corte de luto en señal de dolor por la muerte de tantas ilustres víctimas sacrificadas en esta heroica villa por la lealtad mas pura y acendrado amor á mi Real Persona y á mi Real Familia; y que en todas las iglesias de ella se celebre con la solemnidad correspondiente un oficio y misa por el eterno descanso de sus almas. Y habiéndose visto en mi Consejo de las Indias, con lo que expuso mi Fiscal, y consultádome sobre ello en tres de Junio de este año, he venido en anular, como por la presente mi Real cédula anulo, el decreto de las Cortes de dos de Mayo de mil ochocientos once, en que prescribió los términos en que se debía celebrar el referido aniversario; y al mismo tiempo he resuelto que en todas las iglesias Catedrales de ambas Américas, sus islas adyacentes y de Filipinas, se celebre en lo sucesivo en dicho dia igual funcion religiosa que la dispuesta para Madrid. En su consecuencia mando á mis Virreyes y Gobernadores Vice-Patronos, y ruego y encargo á los M. RR. Arzobispos y RR. Obispos de aquellos mis dominios, cumplan y egecuten, y hagan cumplir y egecutar la expresada mi Real

determinacion: que asi es mi voluntad.
Fecha en ~~Palacio~~ á ~~Madrid~~
de ~~Madrid~~ de mil ochocientos diez y siete.

Yo el Rey

Por n^o del Rey nro. Sr.

Esteban Canales

Para que en las iglesias Catedrales de los reinos de Indias e islas Filipinas se celebre un oficio y misa por el descanso de las ilustres víctimas de fidelidad, sacrificadas en Madrid el dia dos de Mayo de mil ochocientos ocho.

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annulling the decree of the Courts of the second day of May of the year where I prescribed the terms in which the referred anniversary was to be celebrated, and at the same time, I have decided that in all of the Cathedral Churches of both Americas, its adjacent islands and the Philippines, hereinafter in the same day there shall be celebrated similar religious function that the one ordered for Madrid. Consequently I order to my Viceroys and Governors, Vice-Patrons, and I plea and request to the Very Reverend Archbishops and Reverend Bishops of those my domains, to fulfill and implement and to make others fulfill and Implement the said Real Determination: since it is my will. Dated at the Palace on the ninth day of October of the year one-thousand and seventeen.

I, the King

By order of the King, our Lord

Esteban Varea

(Secretary)

So in all the Cathedral Churches of my Realms of the Indies and Philippine Islands a Ceremony and Mass is celebrated for the eternal response of the illustrious victims who died due to their fidelity, and were sacrificed in Madrid on the second day of May of the year one thousand eight-hundred and eight.

Placed on the Napoleon Series: April 2017

