

# POLITICS AND IDEAS IN LATIN AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

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- Americanos: Latin America's Struggle for Independence.** By John Charles Chasteen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. xx + 218. \$28.00 paper.
- Debates sobre las independencias iberoamericanas.** Edited by Manuel Chust and José Antonio Serrano. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2007. Pp. ix + 340. €28.00 paper.
- From Sovereign Villages to National States: City, State, and Federation in Central America, 1759–1839.** By Jordana Dym. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006. Pp. xxxi + 390. \$45.00 cloth.
- Myths of Harmony: Race and Republicanism During the Age of Revolution, Colombia, 1795–1831.** By Marixa Lasso. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007. Pp. viii + 203. \$24.95 paper.
- Enlightenment, Governance, and Reform in Spain and its Empire, 1759–1808.** By Gabriel Paquette. Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Pp. xi + 244. \$69.95 cloth.
- Brasil y las independencias de Hispanoamérica.** By João Paulo Pimenta. Translated by Víctor and Pablo García Guerrero. Castellón de la Plana, Spain: Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I, 2007. Pp. 149. €15.00 paper.

In 1985, a leading Latin American historian in the United States concluded in a cogent essay that independence from Spain changed its former colonies in Spanish America very little: “in this maintenance into the national period of the basic structures of colonial society, one sees vividly the antirevolutionary character of the independence ‘revolutions.’”<sup>1</sup> Colonial elites, he said, led the independence movements, and they did so largely to defend their privileges against both unruly subalterns and a potentially aggressive reformed Bourbon monarchy. Twenty years later, the same historian had come to see the independence movements quite

1. George Reid Andrews, “Spanish American Independence: A Structural Analysis,” *Latin American Perspectives* 12 (1985): 128.

differently: they were indeed revolutionary, in spite of the antirevolutionary ambitions of many leaders who “had not foreseen . . . that the free population would prove just as internally divided in Spanish America as in Haiti and that bitter civil wars would rage on in much of the region for a decade or more.” Conflicts within the colonies provided subaltern groups, including slaves, with an opportunity to influence the outcomes of independence and the early formation of national states in “the first great wave of social and political reform in Latin American history.”<sup>2</sup> What caused historians of independence to experience such a profound reevaluation, from a gloomy emphasis on colonial legacies to a cautiously optimistic view of democratic revolution, a view that many today share?

Part of the answer lies in the transformations in social and cultural history under way in many fields: a shift from structural analysis to an explanation of agency, from large narratives to competing ones.<sup>3</sup> Yet this change of perspective is also particular to the findings and methods of scholarship on Latin American history. The collected volume *Debates sobre las independencias iberoamericanas* offers an excellent starting point for exploring changes in the field by offering informed overviews of historiography in various Latin American countries, with the exception of the Spanish Caribbean (Spain and Portugal are also absent). In their introduction, Manuel Chust and José Antonio Serrano cite the historiographical break that occurred in the 1960s. Until then, there was “una interpretación maniquea” among Latin Americanists and across the political spectrum in regard to the causes, protagonists, and consequences of the wars of independence: these wars were “la forja de la nación,” in which the distinct *pueblos* of America came together and threw off the divisions of colonial society (10–11). Heroes celebrated by the left and right alike led this collective struggle against the *gachupines* (Spaniards born in the Iberian Peninsula).

In the 1960s, an explosion in academic studies and the introduction of dependency theory and Marxism as explanatory paradigms challenged this consensus. Chust and Serrano signal four areas of innovation that made the greatest impact on the field: “primera, la historia regional; segunda, el cuestionamiento de la ineluctable independencia; tercera, el debate sobre el desempeño productivo de las estructuras económicas de los siglos XVIII y XIX; cuarta, los aportes de la historia social; y por último, el ‘desmonte del culto a los héroes’” (15). Dependency theory and Marxism have since lost their explanatory edge, whereas democratization in many

2. George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 54–55.

3. William H. Sewell Jr., “The Political Unconscious of Social and Cultural History; or, Confessions of a Former Quantitative Historian,” *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 22–80.

Latin American countries has awakened new interest in politics, rights, and the state. Recent studies have moved toward political history, focusing on the Cortes of Cádiz, citizenship, royalists, and subalterns. A more fragmented and contingent understanding of independence has taken shape, less triumphalist than earlier nationalist histories but also more attuned to the democratic potential of Latin America's age of revolution.<sup>4</sup>

The studies reviewed here confirm this characterization of research trends. Royalists and subalterns are firmly situated in the explanation of events. Debates over citizenship at the Cortes of Cádiz and in the Americas are at the heart of these histories. The works by Jordana Dym and Marixa Lasso, in particular, offer compelling evidence that such struggles most effectively explain Spanish American independence.

Gabriel Paquette's thoughtful and widely researched study of the Bourbon reforms is especially edifying in regard to monarchy. In characterizing the attitudes and goals of Caroline officials, Paquette emphasizes two aspects: emulation and negotiation. On the one hand, Spaniards voraciously, but selectively, read British, French, Italian, and German works on commerce, agriculture, history, and jurisprudence. They also considered the strengths and weaknesses of other imperial regimes and pondered their applicability to Spain's overseas domains. Paquette calls this process emulation, instead of imitation, because Spaniards read critically, always keeping in mind the peculiarities of the Spanish monarchy. On the other hand, in seeking to implement reform overseas, metropolitan officials invariably clashed with local officials and creole elites gathered in newly important associations, the *consulados* and *sociedades económicas de los amigos del país*. Reform resulted from negotiation between the center and the periphery because "a significant discrepancy existed between discourses of trade, governance, and population growth in Madrid-based circles and the political sentiments and ideas proffered by 'men-on-the-spot'; that is, the governors, intendants and their subalterns who administered the vast overseas empire" (94). This is a familiar approach to the history of Spanish monarchy; indeed, the limits of imperial control are now a major theme in the assessment of other European overseas empires.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, I

4. Influential studies that point in this direction are David Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); François-Xavier Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias: Ensayos sobre las revoluciones hispánicas* (Madrid: MAPFRE, 1992); Jaime Rodríguez O., *The Independence of Spanish America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

5. The discrepancy between center and periphery is a recurrent theme in John H. Elliott's works on the Habsburg era. Among other studies on Spain and Spanish America during the Bourbon reforms, see Stanley Stein and Barbara Stein, *Apogee of Empire: Spain and New Spain in the Age of Charles III, 1759–1789* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); David Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005). Recent characterizations of other imperial regimes in com-

have one point of disagreement with this exploration of governance on the periphery: is it useful to characterize Cuba as a peripheral colony? Recent studies suggest the contrary, not only during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Madrid and Havana found their interests converging on the urgent issue of the transatlantic slave traffic, but also as far back as the sixteenth century, when Havana became an essential way station in the *flota* system.<sup>6</sup>

Where Paquette emphasizes negotiation and the limits of reform, Dym sees more consequential changes in her study of municipal government and independence in Central America—the kingdom of Guatemala in the colonial period. In her judgment, the Bourbon reforms had a significant impact well into early independence. To explain why the kingdom of Guatemala split into several independent nations, Dym finds it necessary “to shift the timeline back fifty years prior to independence to the period of the Bourbon Reforms” (xxi). Fundamental change came, she asserts, from the Bourbon desire to streamline governance. Habsburg colonial cities exerted important control over their hinterlands. The Bourbons weakened such control by endowing more towns with their own structures of governance so as to bring more subjects under the authority of the monarchy. Dym places particular emphasis on one of the consequences of this change: “[Bourbon] policies sought to achieve uniformity in governance while at the same time increasing royal income. Unintentionally, the ends were achieved at the long-term cost of providing fodder for the growth of localist sentiment that bridged socioeconomic divisions and, operating through municipal authorities, developed new tools to challenge royal policy” (60).

This fragmented landscape of jurisdictions defined the terrain of the revolutionary era in the kingdom of Guatemala, as towns and cities jockeyed to assert their control after the Spanish monarch Ferdinand VII ceded his throne to the French in 1808. In independent Central America, it also unleashed protracted struggles over the limits of sovereignty, given that so many municipal governments claimed legitimate authority. As elsewhere in the Spanish Indies, Central American municipalities were wary of metropolitan efforts to assume sovereignty in the absence of the legitimate monarch, first through the Seville Junta, then the Regency, and finally the Cortes of Cádiz, though many participated in the last. Implementation of the Constitution of Cádiz in 1812 varied locally. During the drafting of this constitution, Central American deputies objected to the

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parable terms include Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

6. See Alejandro de la Fuente, with the collaboration of César García del Pino and Bernardo Iglesias Delgado, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

exclusion of *castas* from the exercise of active citizenship. Because *peninsulares* predominated in the Cortes, they overrode colonial resistance. Yet once the constitution took hold after its completion in 1812, then again when it was restored in 1820, municipal governments largely ignored the strictures against castas, allowing them to vote and hold office. Spanish officials expressed concern but did little to alter the practical application of new political rules. Thus, the municipal reforms of the eighteenth century strengthened Central American communities across the typical divisions of colonial society, even though the Cortes of Cádiz had tried to reassert those divisions in its constitutional strictures, most fatally by formally discriminating against people of African descent. This conflict between localities in Central America and the metropolis would be writ large across the Indies in the revolutionary era and was a major factor in the severing of ties between Spain and the colonies.

Lasso's study of politics and ideas in Caribbean Colombia—the viceroyalty of New Granada—also spans the colonial and independence periods and similarly calls attention to colonial-metropolitan clashes after 1808. Like Dym, Lasso emphasizes the inclusiveness of local politics in the revolutionary era by arguing that various groups forged a myth of racial harmony during the breakdown of Spanish authority as they sought to overcome the legal handicaps based on lineage that were typical of colonial society. She explains: "Studies of race relations have tended to approach the declaration of equality only to denounce its failures. They correctly point out that legal equality did not eliminate racial discrimination." But the discrepancy between the ideal and reality is only part of the story in her view: "[T]he powerful association among republicanism, nationalism, and racial equality that characterized the Spanish American independence period cannot be taken for granted. To do so not only fails to address the complex processes of myth construction but also trivializes a major and fascinating historical moment" (9–10).

To explore this construction of myth, Lasso focuses on the revolutionary crucible of Cartagena de Indias after the collapse of metropolitan power in 1808. This was the site of a hot war throughout the struggle for independence. One consequence of such fierce conflict was that "patriot nationalism consistently gained power and cohesion by setting itself in sharp contrast to Spain" (49). This process was especially evident in constitutions of the period. The Constitution of Cádiz of 1812 upheld slavery and the slave trade (largely through silence) and discrimination against castas. Cartagena's 1812 constitution, in contrast: "eliminated legal color distinctions; guaranteed suffrage to all free men but vagrants and servants; and, although it did not abolish slavery, outlawed the slave trade. In addition, *pardos* of modest origin became members of the constitutional assembly, the war council, and the parliament" (78).

Differences between Spanish and national rule thus became more clearly etched during the struggle for independence, as patriot forces attracted more support from free people of color and slaves.<sup>7</sup> In 1815, during the savage war of reconquest waged by the Spanish general Pablo Morillo, a political leader seeking to rally support told the people of Cartagena: "In forming its government, Spain excluded America from its rightful share of representation; American governments opposed this arbitrary measure by force. Spain modified it by granting whites their rights but denying them completely to men of color; and the whites then cried out that they would defend with weapons in hand the rights that belong to you. . . . Come, let us unite and give Europe an example of fraternity; let our oppressors know what a people unjustly insulted is capable of doing" (55).

The well-researched and well-written studies of Dym and Lasso thus document how the revolutionary process strengthened the cause of independence and challenged the structures of Spanish rule. Eighteenth-century reforms seem to have had greater impact in Central America and more persistence after independence. In Cartagena, the rupture with the colonial period would seem more drastic. Before 1808, it was actually the Spanish Crown that sought to promote, selectively, the privileges of free people of color through measures such as the purchase of legal whiteness, which met with bitter opposition from colonial elites protective of their status.<sup>8</sup> But after 1808, the patriot side became the vehicle for the political and social aspirations of free blacks and mulattoes in Cartagena; the same would prove true elsewhere in Spanish America.

The findings of Dym and Lasso echo in the new survey of Latin American independence by John Charles Chasteen, whose attention to regional particularity and to the role of subalterns in the independence wars is indeed reflected in the title of his book: *Americanos*. He chose this title because it "clarifies the crucial extension of the definition of Sovereign People from whites only to anyone born in América" (4).

*Americanos* is a highly readable and cogent overview that reflects effectively on current debates. I would endorse using it in a survey of Latin American history. Unlike John Lynch in his classic *The Spanish American Revolutions*, Chasteen finds little sign of separatist ideology or politics in Spanish America before the imperial crisis of 1808.<sup>9</sup> Where Lynch had argued that the Bourbon reforms heightened tensions between metropolis

7. On slavery and the Spanish American revolutions, see Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 53–84; Peter Blanchard, *Under the Flags of Freedom: Slave Soldiers and the Wars of Independence Spanish South America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

8. Ann Twinam, "Pedro de Ayarza: The Purchase of Whiteness," in *The Human Tradition in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Kenneth J. Andrien (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2002), 194–210.

9. John Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808–1826* (New York: Norton, 1973).

and colonies by creating a more intrusive and exclusive form of governance, Paquette and Dym show that such a characterization is problematic. Reforms were regionally specific and the consequences highly negotiated.<sup>10</sup> Independence movements erupted from the crisis of the Spanish monarchy and developed in the interplay between local and metropolitan responses.<sup>11</sup> In Chasteen's telling, many independence leaders manipulated the religiosity and monarchism of the masses by espousing loyalty to the deposed king, Ferdinand VII. To mobilize support, they wore, in Chasteen's formulation, "the mask of Fernando" (56).

Chasteen also brings the Portuguese empire into the narrative of independence, making his work even more attractive for use in class. Recent studies by Brazilian scholars have shown that Spanish and Portuguese struggles over independence were intertwined, despite significant differences between the two colonial regimes of Iberia, their divergent responses to the French threat (the Portuguese monarch fled to Rio de Janeiro, which became the imperial center), and their quite different methods of separation from Europe. João Paulo Pimenta also demonstrates that, as war raged in neighboring Spanish colonies, Portugal and Brazil hoped to maintain social peace and territorial unity. Spanish America became a sounding board for Brazilian aspirations and fears. As long as the Portuguese center remained in Rio, Brazilians tended to see Spanish America as "un teatro de destrucción"; but when Dom João returned to Portugal and many Brazilians opted for independence, the new Spanish American republics became "un paradigma de liberación" (28). Moreover, such reflections were not carried out in an aloof fashion; the Portuguese and then the Brazilian monarchy became directly involved in the Spanish American wars on the frontier with Río de la Plata. The struggle over the status of the Banda Oriental, later Uruguay, would implicate Brazil in Spanish America for several decades.

As effectively as Chasteen weaves new research into *Americanos*, the work nevertheless omits two broad areas essential for an understanding of independence in Latin America. First, in Brazilian historiography, it is clear that Brazil's links to Angola—forged in the mid-seventeenth century in wars with the Dutch and with kingdoms in Central Africa—were in many ways more important than its links to the Portuguese metropolis. Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, among others, has shown that Brazilians took war to the Dutch both in Pernambuco and Angola to reassert and then

10. See John H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), on the sturdiness of Habsburg structures and mentalities in the Indies through the eighteenth century.

11. Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

enlarge the flow of human captives to Brazilian shores. This Brazil-Angola axis survived independence in 1822 and continued to flourish until the British forced the abolition of the slave trade in 1850.<sup>12</sup> Thus, to understand colonial Brazil and the transition to independent monarchy, the politics of the South Atlantic slave trade require more attention and explanation: they are at the center, not the margins, of the Brazilian independence process.

Second, Chasteen acknowledges the importance of religion to the Latin American masses who supported independence but treats it largely as an impediment to revolutionary consciousness by arguing that cosmopolitan elites well versed in enlightened ideas, such as Father Hidalgo in Mexico, gradually wooed the masses by using the trappings of monarchism and Catholicism, the so-called mask of Fernando. This configuration of masses and leaders, popular beliefs and elite revolutionary ideology, is not very convincing. More explanation of colonial religiosity, a rich historiographical vein, would aid in clarifying the relations between religion and revolution in a less binary and schematic way.<sup>13</sup> The same might be said for monarchism, about which we know less. Yet as Chust and Serrano indicate, studies of royalists are increasing and will shed light on why loyalty to the monarchy was so durable. This shortcoming in *Americanos* suggests one direction of future research: we now know far more about the politics of independence, but research remains to be done on the ideas of the era, not only among educated elites but also among the whole range of social groups that took part in the overthrow of colonial rule and the building of new regimes.<sup>14</sup>

12. Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, *O trato dos viventes: Formação do Brasil no Atlântico sul* (São Paulo: Companhia Das Letras, 2000). See also Zephyr Frank, *Dutra's World: Wealth and Family in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004); João José Reis, Flávio dos Santos Gomes, and Marcus J. M. de Carvalho, "África e Brasil entre margens: Aventuras e desaventuras do africano Rufino José Maria, c. 1822–1853," *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* 26 (2004): 257–302; Rafael de Bivar Marquese, "A dinâmica da escravidão no Brasil: Resistência, tráfico negreiro e alforrias, séculos XVII a XIX," *Novos Estudos* 74 (2006): 107–123.

13. For overviews, see Allan Greer and Kenneth Mills, "A Catholic Atlantic," in *The Atlantic in Global History, 1500–2000*, ed. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Erik Seeman (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007), 3–19; William Christian Jr. "Catholicisms," in *Local Religion in Colonial Mexico*, ed. Martin Austin Nesvig (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 259–268. On religion, monarchism, and revolution, see Eric Van Young, *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Mexican Struggle for Independence, 1810–1821* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

14. Similar pleas are made in Laurent Dubois, "An Enslaved Enlightenment: Rethinking the Intellectual History of the French Atlantic," *Social History* 31 (February 2006): 1–14; Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550–1700* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 215–234.