WAS THERE AN AGE OF REVOLUTION IN LATIN AMERICA?

New Literature on Latin American Independence

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THE WARS OF INDEPENDENCE IN SPANISH AMERICA. Edited by Christon I. Archer. (Jaguar Books on Latin America, no. 20. Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources Books, 2000. Pp. 325. $55.00 cloth, $18.95 paper.)

The study of independence remains one of the main topics in Latin American history, but perspectives on the era have changed considerably during the past decades. While for a long time the movements for independence from Spain were interpreted, especially in the national historiographies, as the founding years of each nation-state and treated as an epoch in its own right, today the “middle period” or the “Age of Revolution” are discussed as adequate time frames to study the breakdown of colonial rule and the beginning of the new nation-states. Two of the books under review here subscribe to this larger perspective. One questions the inclusion of Latin America into the list of regions experiencing revolution, while the other focuses on the movements for

independence and especially the wars between insurgents and royalists implying a concentration during the years from 1808 to 1825. The Wars of Independence in Spanish America, edited by Christon I. Archer, concentrates on the process of fighting and adopts, at least in parts, a microhistoric view to provide a better understanding of the insurgents and the royalists. The volume brings together thirteen chapters published earlier elsewhere and is organized into four sections: the origins of insurrection; the insurgency and counterinsurgency in New Spain; caudillismo, war, and insurgency in South America; and finally, the defeat of Spain in the Americas. In sections two and three on warfare in New Spain and South America, some central documents are included. Each chapter starts with a useful short preamble by Archer, who skillfully situates the respective contribution in the historical and scholarly context. Archer also provides an introduction to the volume dealing with the reasons for independence. The author uses a wide variety of examples to illustrate life at the end of the colonial period and during the war. This style is a strength of the chapter but at the same time also its weakness. The colorful and vivid pictures sometimes seem too detailed for an overview. While Archer concentrates on New Spain, Brian Hamnett addresses the insurrection and the royalist reaction to it in New Granada. Regional differences in economics and social structure resulted in conflicts that were added to the struggle between the colony and Spain.

The part on New Spain brings together a microstudy by Virginia Guedea that focuses on a poor worker who was drawn into the fights between insurgents and counterinsurgents by coincidence, and not because he adhered to one side or the other. The protagonist was forced to become a messenger for the insurgents by force, and when the royal troops caught him, he was threatened with capital punishment. Guedea uses his case to show how all people were affected by the ongoing war without really taking sides themselves. The second essay by Peter Guardino shows a different situation in the area that later became the state of Guerrero. The region was one of the major arenas of social and political conflict during the wars of independence. Guardino argues that popular participation in the warfare on the insurgent side occurred because local elites and peasants shared concrete interests as well as basic notions of politics, justice, and legitimacy. A cross-class alliance formed, integrating such diverse groups as Indian peasants, mulatto sharecroppers, provincial muleteers, hacendados, and priests. Thus, Guardino’s study defies the notion that members of the lower classes only participated in the war of independence as cannon fodder, without pursuing their own goals. These two fine pieces on the diverse reasons for popular participation in the war are complemented by two documents: one on the program of counterinsurgency authored by Félix
Calleja, then commander of the Army of the Center from 1811, and the other a military dispatch dated 1818 from viceroy Juan Ruiz de Apodaca.

The third part of the volume features four documents and one article on the wars of independence in South America, concentrating on Venezuela. The first is an account by George Flinter, a veteran of the British army who had fought in the Napoleonic Wars and afterwards came to Caracas as a translator and business agent. Flinter aligned with the royalist side and denied any atrocities committed by the Spanish army while he damned the patriots. The second one consists of a letter by José de Cevallos, interim captain general of Caracas, in which he proposed measures to improve the situation of the castas, but whose call went unanswered. Following are views on Simón Bolívar by two of his supporters, General Daniel Florencio O’Leary and General H.L.V. Ducoudray Holstein. Stephen K. Stoan’s essay describes the fate of General Pablo Morillo and his expeditionary forces in the provinces of New Granada and why the royalists lost the war. Finally, another piece taken from the memories of General O’Leary gives his view on the Guayaquil Conference and on Bolívar’s relations with Peru.

The book’s last three essays explore the defeat of Spain in the Americas. Timothy Anna focuses on the last two years of royal government in Peru and pays attention to the chaos resulting from the dilemma Peruvians felt between the options of the old empire, with all its grievances, or independence, with the threat of social destruction, militarism and possible foreign domination. The last two chapters address the Spanish army in the Americas. Rebecca Earle’s essay concentrates on the problem of disease the soldiers faced in the often unhealthy climate and describes how military doctors tried to cure them. Finally, Margaret L. Woodward analyses the Spanish troops in America and the attitudes of officers and soldiers who often viewed overseas service as a form of involuntary servitude. The volume ends with a chapter suggesting further reading. In sum, it is to be highly commended for its pedagogical value, especially the section on New Spain, which provides a much-needed perspective on the lower classes and their involvement in the movement. Christon Archer did a fine job editing and publishing the materials included.

The essays selected in the volume Latin America between Colony and Nation by John Lynch were written over the last three decades and most of them have been published previously. The first originates from the still important volume Latin American Revolutions, 1808–1826, two contributions appeared for the first time in 1983, four in the early 1990s, and two are published for the first time in this volume. In his introduc-
tory essay Lynch gives a personal account on how he became a Latin Americanist in the 1950s when Latin American history was almost neglected in Great Britain (as well as in other European countries) and criticizes the perception still held by some, that Latin America is less important than European history. The author describes why he chose the topics he did for studying and also his approach to history. Lynch warns his readers that the quest for theory and conceptualization might not help to clarify history but distort it instead. He also rejects newer, postmodern historiographical trends, because he thinks that historical truth has to be discovered without giving room to inventions or constructions, but in so doing he may be misrepresenting these concepts.\(^3\)

Traditional convictions inform Lynch’s writing on Latin American. The book contains eight essays covering the time periods from conquest to the nineteenth century. Most relevant for this review are five essays that deal with the colonial roots of independence and the course of the movements. Lynch describes the colonial state and the colonial consensus established between the crown and its American subjects from 1650 to 1750. During this period the administration had to consider local interests by giving creole elites influence on their matters. The Bourbon reforms disturbed this arrangement. In its effort to install an absolutist regime, the crown no longer accepted local influence and directly competed with American economic and political interests. This important reason for discontent in the colonies is taken up again in the essay on the colonial roots for the Independence movements. In addition to the de-Americanization of the colonial administration, Lynch analyses economic developments, noting especially the diverse effects that *comercio libre* had in different regions and for different interest groups. He also discusses popular unrest and rebellion during the last decades of the colonial epoch. The author reflects at some length on the political ideas in the era. Although he does not perceive the Enlightenment as a source for independence, he attributes some influence to it because its ideas could be invoked by the insurgents to legitimize their quest for freedom from colonial rule. Finally, Lynch focuses on the formation of an American identity, judging that the incipient nationalism was a predominantly Creole nationalism.

In another contribution to the volume Lynch surveys the role of the Church during the independence movements. The high clergy remained loyal to the crown, fearing the threat posed by Independence and liberalism to the position of the Church. But the lower clergy, consisting

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mainly of Creoles, suffered many grievances. The expulsion of the Jesuits, the appointment of compliant bishops and the difficulties for Creoles to rise in the hierarchy, and (most important) the attack by the crown on church resources helped to alienate the lower clergy. Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos are cited as prominent examples of the support given to independence by the lower clergy. Again, Lynch addresses the question of the influence of ideas on the independence movements and comes to the conclusion that Creole nationalism was much more important than scholasticism or the Enlightenment.

This argument is taken up in Lynch’s essay on Simón Bolívar in the age of revolution. Lynch intends to show the originality of Bolívar’s political thought by analyzing his most important writings, including the Jamaica Letter, the Cartagena Manifesto, the Angostura Address, and the Bolivian Constitution. A second contribution on Bolívar concentrates on how he was able to gain the support of regional caudillos during the wars of independence. Without the incorporation of the regional strongmen, who were a product of the wars of independence, into a national movement, Bolívar would not have been able to achieve what he did. But this inclusion was no easy task and Bolívar’s policy of using caudillos to control caudillos had only limited success. Nevertheless, he could integrate the caudillos into a national army and thereby secure victory for the insurgents in the end. After independence, however, caudillos again started to follow their own interests, a development which coincided with nationalism. Therefore, Bolívar could not succeed in establishing Gran Colombia as a viable state.

Taken together, the essays by Lynch overlap considerably in their argument. Given the fact that some of them were first published as early as 1983, they provide little fresh information or interpretation. The book has its strength as an overview of the reasons for the insurgents to reject Spanish rule and the dynamics of the process of independence. The chapter on the roots of independence remains an excellent summary of the grievances in the colonies, integrating a wide variety of economic, social, political, and cultural topics. In the classroom it would probably be useful to use additional new scholarship to give students an idea of new approaches to the understanding of the independence movements. Lynch’s conclusion that creole nationalism was the driving force behind the rebellion against colonial rule emphasizes elite politics and outstanding leaders of the movement, reflecting the more traditional perception of history Lynch lays out in the first essay of the volume. Lynch believes that Latin America should not be included in the discussion of an age of revolution because the independence originated in patterns only reigning in the Spanish colonies, which were far removed from the European developments of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain and the political events of the French Revolution.
While Lynch concentrates on the last decades of the colonial era and the grievances leading to independence, the volume *Independence and Revolution in Spanish America: Perspectives and Problems*, edited by Anthony McFarlane and Eduardo Posada-Carbó focuses on the movements and its effects during the first decades of the nineteenth century. All the contributions were presented at a workshop in 1996 organized by the Institute of Latin American Studies at London University and the School of Comparative American Studies at the University of Warwick. The eight essays are presented in two parts. The first one offers perspectives on historiography, interpretation and comparison, while the second features five case studies on New Granada, Argentina, Venezuela, Chile, and Mexico.

In the first essay John Lynch surveys historical writings on independence published between 1985 and 1995. He concludes that independence today is understood as a transitional period and not as a separate period, but according to Lynch the new approaches to Spanish American independence leave a picture of “basically the same subject we always knew” (41). That is, he sees only revisions on particular aspects in interpretation but no new broad concepts, theories, or questions that might create fundamentally new understandings. This unexciting vision of what he projects for future research is implicitly confirmed by some of the following essays. In fact, Rebecca Earle’s well-written description of the behavior of the Spanish expeditionary forces in New Granada, which alienated large parts of the population who had supported the royalist cause, and Klaus Gallo’s piece on political instability in post-independence Argentina do not provide new interpretations.

But the rest of the essays do apply new approaches and interpretations to independence. François-Xavier Guerra emphasizes the character of the independence movements as a single process. The author warns against analyzing independence as a series of different conflicts in different nation-states and instead insists on an underlying unity of the political process triggered by Spain’s collapse in 1808. The insurgents considered themselves as Americans first; only later did a rhetoric of national identity surge. Guerra gives some hints for fruitful further investigation, stating that independence left some problems to be solved to the new states. The creation of nations was one of the main legacies left to the new era of independence. In the social realm the old order of estates had to be replaced by an order based on individuals and citizens.

These same aspects are present in three of the case studies included in the volume. Timothy Anna argues along a similar line as Guerra when he rejects the traditional interpretation of federalism in Mexico. Federalism was sometimes seen as a threat to national unity but Anna refutes this view on the ground that it evaluates the process from its outcome. Instead, he emphasizes, federalism was not a threat to
Mexican unity but rather created it, that is, “Mexican nationhood was the product of federalism, not its victim” (191). Although federalism is not condemned as unanimously as Anna claims,4 his argument against judging the formation of the nation-states existing today as an unavoidable outcome of the breakdown of the Spanish empire is valid. Seen that way, the conceptualization of independence as national liberation deserves to be restudied, as both Anna and Guerra contend.

In her contribution Véronique Hebrard employs a new approach to citizenship to Venezuelan independence. Based on a meticulous study of such texts as constitutions and laws regulating the electoral process, she shows that the conceptualization of the citizen emerged from the perception of his utility. According to these texts, in order to obtain full citizenship rights Venezuelans had to be able to act for the common good. For example, a citizen had to own property or have a certain regular income. Another access to citizenship was serving in the army, which was seen as defending the nation. However, as Hebrard shows, neither economic nor military status remained static prerequisites over the years. The income necessary to receive all voting rights rose until 1830; the inclusion of regular soldiers into the body of voters eventually came under dispute. The discrepancies between the doctrine of sovereignty of the people and the exclusion of large parts of the population resulted from the fear of the elites of el plebe, or the masses.

Alfredo Jocelyn-Holt Letelier discusses the political history of Chile from a cultural perspective. He claims that in the process of state-building, culture was more important than political events, due to the fact that the elite remained almost unchanged before and after independence. Nevertheless, the legitimization of this elite’s political power was based on new concepts. By proclaiming the república de la virtud the elite propagated the idea that virtue had to be the general principal of government especially of a republican one. But virtue according to this discourse did not reside in the people at large but was attached to the elite. Jocelyn-Holt concludes that political changes coming with independence are not reducible to the state but affected society’s political culture in a much deeper sense.

The most innovative work reviewed here is the volume State and Society in Spanish America during the Age of Revolution, edited by Victor Uribe-Uran. It features eight separate essays plus an introduction and conclusion. The essays were originally delivered on different panels at the American Historical Association’s annual meetings and the Latin American Studies Association’s international congress. The

contributions are grouped into four parts. The first one deals with political economy. The second addresses elites, state-building, and business. The third focuses on gender and family relations. The fourth section concentrates on ideologies, values, and cultural practices. Each part consists of two essays that span the late colonial era to the first decades after independence. The conclusions concentrate on the historiographical value of the concept of an age of revolution for understanding Latin American independence.

The first two contributions focus on macroeconomic developments to explain the poor performance of Latin American economies after independence and thereby engage in the ongoing discussion whether underdevelopment originated in the colonial or in the national period. Both essays contribute new arguments and come to the conclusion that development cannot be described as a movement “down from colonialism” because the economic performances discussed were already under way during the colonial era. Yet while the first essay attributes at least part of the causes to Spanish rule, the second one confines the discussion exclusively to economics.

Samuel Amaral and Richard Doringo analyze data pertaining to population, agriculture, trade and industry, and money and credit in Latin America and in Europe. Their findings contradict the conclusion of an influential volume edited by Stephen Haber some years ago. Amaral and Doringo contend that there was no moment of missed opportunities or false decisions after independence but that Latin America was already behind at the time of independence. The authors base this finding on long-term trends already under way during the last decades of the colonial era and emphasize the restrictive influence of institutions. Furthermore Amaral and Doringo trace the economic transformations back as far as the early 1770s and attribute them to the cumulative evolutionary process of the world economy. As they emphasize, an increasing integration of the world economy does not mean similar patterns of change for different regions and countries.

Richard Salvucci discusses Latin American economic problems since the 1960s as the result of a development called “Dutch disease.” Salvucci believes that the phenomenon already afflicted Latin America as early as the eighteenth century. Dutch disease can occur in an export boom,


especially a boom in natural resource exports, and has detrimental effects on the domestic production of goods. To underline his argument Salvucci chooses four examples: the silver boom in New Spain at the end of the colonial era, the guano export in Peru of the 1840s, the rise of coffee as the main export product in Brazil, and the prevalence of sugar in the Cuban export economy. In all cases the author finds support for his thesis of Dutch disease, which brings him to the conclusion that Latin American economic problems had no effect on the deteriorating terms of trade as the dependency school has contended.

The second part of the book on elites, state building, and business features two studies concentrating on special social groups in Venezuela and Chile respectively. Victor Uribe-Uran studies continuities and changes in the social position of *letrados* in Venezuela. He uses Max Weber to explain the concept of status that gave important impulses to individual behavior. During the colonial era education and state service generated sources of honor and status. Therefore participation in the state bureaucracy was attractive not only as a source of income but as a possibility to accumulate honor and to improve one’s status. In addition, bureaucrats not only achieved honor but also passed it on to their families. After independence political strife resulted from the unwillingness of old families who traditionally dominated positions in the bureaucracy to give up their source of honor and status. Therefore, they resented republican constitutions and favored a conservative system of government. This segment of the elite was opposed by another group of provincial landed gentry, merchants, mine owners, lawyers, priests, and military officers, all of whom lacked status attached to administrative positions. Both factions fought for control of the state apparatus and eventually became the source of the nascent Conservative and Liberal parties. Uribe-Uran believes this to be an explanation for political instability after independence. His conclusion seems plausible, although other factors (e.g., regional interests) in addition to honor through bureaucratic appointments also played a role.

Marti Lamar’s essay elaborates on the continuities in the import-export trade in Chile. She investigates a sample of thirty-two leading merchants from 1792–1819 and comes to the conclusion that although most of the Spanish merchants who dominated business before the turn of the century had disappeared from the commercial scene and had given way to mainly British merchants in the import-export trade and to Chilean merchants who engaged in internal trade other aspects of commerce remained intact. Many business practices changed little over the period under study. What did change, however, was that merchants adopted a more profit-oriented style and integrated fewer family members in their business. Lamar attributes this development to a change in mentality. During the colonial era social status of the merchants did
not depend exclusively on their economic performance but also on their honor which in part depended on their charity and their willingness to care for their family and friends.

Both Uribe-Uran and Lamar thus see a long-term change in the meaning and significance of the concept of honor. In the light of other studies, such as the work by Susan Chambers,7 this seems to be a promising field for further research. Studies of value systems and of the meaning of significant concepts that informed the behavior of historical actors might help to better understand Latin American societies and their specific characteristics.

The two contributions on gender relations both focus on Mexico. Sonya Lipsett-Rivera examines ideas about marriage and the appropriate roles for men and women, and what marriage partners expected from one another. She analyses two sets of documents. The first consists of manuals written by moralists and additional documents revealing the ideas of the Church on the proper behavior of husband and wife. The second set of documents concerns marital disputes. Using both sources reveals that the moralist’s model of marriage was an ideal. Nevertheless it influenced marriages by providing a framework and a measuring rod against which Mexicans could judge their marital relations. Ideas on marriage and the family invoked a reciprocal but hierarchical gendered order. The reciprocal duties consisted (for the husband) in providing food and clothes for his wife and children. In return, wives were accountable for the domestic economy. In addition, they were expected to obey and submit to their husbands. When this order was disturbed by one side not fulfilling its duties, sometimes men and more often women looked for judicial help and declared *malos tratos* or petitioned for divorce. Although the general framework remained intact during the time period under study, Lipsett-Rivera finds that women gained some autonomy during the last decades of the colonial period. The Bourbons had already begun to recognize the importance of women in educating their children. Therefore political reformers stressed female education, a trend that continued after independence. Thus a connection was made between parenting and the formation of future citizens, which increased the importance of mothers. Women used this argument to further their moral authority within the family.

While Lipsett-Rivera discovers a change towards more autonomy for women in the long run, Elizabeth A. Kuznesof gives a somewhat contradictory picture of the development of gender relations, household and family life, and the standard of living. She bases her discussion on the extensive literature of the Mexican case. Kuznesof agrees

with Lipsett-Rivera on improvements in female education and better legal rights for single women. She also finds an increase in the employment of women but she is reluctant to interpret this as an improvement, given the fact that occupations for women were only available in limited areas such as domestic service, production and sale of comestibles, and textile production. But these were sectors in decline after independence. Thus, women suffered even more than men from the decline of their standard of living. Furthermore the autonomy of married women, minor daughters, and subordinate males diminished due in part to the decline in the use of the dowry and the requirement of parental permission for marriage.

The last section of the volume includes two articles on cultural themes. John Chasteen discusses social dance and the relationship between the state and popular culture in Argentina. He finds continuity in the reaction of the authorities to dances performed in public. In fear of social upheaval and disorder, both the colonial and the republican administrations prohibited dances. But at the same time dances were almost invariably tolerated, which Chasteen credits to the principle of *obedezco pero no cumplo*. During the independence period and afterwards social dances acquired a new political meaning in the process of constructing national identities. If this was the case one would like to know why the prohibition of social dances remained in place under republican government.

The essay by Mark D. Szuchman attempts to link political belief systems to nonpolitical structures, focusing on the spatial structure of Buenos Aires. He explores four dimensions of urban life: the *pulperías* and *cafés*, the mechanisms of social control, the material basis for urban life, and the connection between politics and aesthetics. An important change in social and political life during the nineteenth century was the rise of a public sphere where political ideas could be exchanged and debates were no longer confined to government officials. These new forms of sociability took place in the *pulperías* and *cafés* of the city as well as under the open sky. The crowds coming together were feared by the elite but at the same time their gathering was exploited for the military draft. Szuchman further elaborates on the architecture in the city showing how it was influenced by politics and ideas.

In the final contribution to this volume, Eric Van Young addresses the question of periodization and of adequate time frames for the study of Latin American independence. He views periodizations as “heuristic devices” rather than final answers in themselves. That is, Van Young takes on the problem of periodization not with the purpose to find sufficient evidence of political, social, economic, and cultural continuities in order to justify setting a period off from other eras. Instead he asks whether the study of a time frame as a period is illuminating or not.
Choosing the second option would mean accepting periods as not fixed but rather flexible and fluid.

Uribe-Uran deserves credit for editing a volume that is cohesive, despite the large variety of themes treated. All essays use a time frame that more or less encompasses the age of revolution. Taken together, they show continuities in different aspects of society, as well as considerable changes that occurred in the political realm and its cultural understanding. The discussion of the time period from 1750 to 1850 is more useful in understanding Latin American history than the more traditional periodization consisting of the colonial era, the wars of independence, and the national period. The character of the period should also be kept in mind. Its denomination as an “Age of Revolution” refers to major changes, which led to an exclusion of Latin America for a long time. On the one hand, the continent was not included in analyses of this epoch because the term revolution implied the notion of social emancipation, which was denied to the Hispanic world. Yet John Lynch rejects the inclusion of Latin America in the age of revolution because he thinks of the independence movements as particular and specific events in Latin American history not comparable to Europe or the United States. While his insistence on the specificity of Latin American developments is well taken, it might be a good reason to include the continent when discussing the age of revolution, since some general patterns of change can be detected especially in the realm of politics, political culture, notions of legitimate power, and social practices. In Europe, the United States, and Latin America, the traditional order collapsed and was replaced by new forms of government that included new forms of political participation. Jaime Rodríguez analyzed this process in his excellent overview of Spanish American independence. In the long run republics were established in Europe and the Americas, though their character differed in considerable ways. The inclusion of Latin America under the heading of political revolutions does not necessarily mean that Latin Americans were merely copying European developments. Rather it shows that there is no single model of the modern nation-state. In addition, the acceptance of a revolution in polity


and politics requires paying more attention to the nineteenth century,\(^\text{11}\) a trend already discernible in historical writing on Latin America.\(^\text{12}\) These studies on the new evolving political systems and on citizenship as well as new forms of sociability\(^\text{13}\) include new questions and approaches to Latin America in the age of revolution that should be taken up by more scholars in the future.

