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Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies

ISSN: 1470-1847 (Print) 1469-9524 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjil20

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To cite this article: Gabriel Paquette, Manuel Lucena-Giraldo, Gonzalo M. Quintero Saravia & Oriol Regué-Sendrós (2018) New directions in the political history of the Spanish-Atlantic world, c. 1750–1850, Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies, 24:2, 175-182, DOI: 10.1080/14701847.2018.1492325

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14701847.2018.1492325

Published online: 25 Jul 2018.

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JOURNAL OF IBERIAN AND LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES
2018, VOL. 24, NO. 2, 175–182
https://doi.org/10.1080/14701847.2018.1492325

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INTRODUCTION

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New directions in the political history of the Spanish-Atlantic world, c. 1750–1850

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This special dossier of JILAS brings together nine essays that shed new light on several important aspects of the political history of the Spanish-Atlantic world c. 1750–1850.[1] As specialists will be well aware, this century, spanning roughly from the Seven Years' War until Spain's African War, has been the subject of renewed historical interest. Undoubtedly, the acute crises facing democracies and republics on both sides of the Atlantic, together with the vicissitudes of citizenship and political participation, have stimulated historians to search for the origins of contemporary political systems. Some themes and topics have been utterly transformed by a new generation of scholars – writing in several European languages – often working in transnational, global, and Atlantic frameworks scarcely imaginable a few decades ago. Though the advances in the historiography have been formidable, many topics and themes remain either under-researched or else new work has provoked fresh questions requiring more research. This dossier therefore aims to pursue new directions as well as to push historiographical advances still further, helping to consolidate gains already made

One of the notable shifts of the past few decades has been the steady narrowing of the gulf that previously separated these scholarly communities working in different locations and languages from one another. The structural factors producing this change are numerous, but some of it may be attributed to European Union-driven academic internationalization, the annihilation of barriers to scholarly exchange by the Internet, and the migration and movement of scholarly communities. The proliferation and deepening of networks has occurred not only within Europe, but also beyond it. One of the most visible changes of recent decades has been the intensification of interactions between the scholars in Europe and those based in the Americas, particularly Latin America.

Emphasis on structural and material forces, however, should not distract attention from intellectual developments. The rise of Atlantic History in the immediate post-World War II period, building on Braudel's insights about Mediterranean civilization, promoted a focus on connections and convergences, inching ever closer to a post-national, cosmopolitan approach to the past. The 1960s were a key moment in a renewed interaction between scholars both from both of the Americas, North and South (Tirado 2014). In the Anglophone world, this orientation toward *histoire croisée*, served as an impetus for myriad ground-breaking books on the early

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modern Iberian empires, of which those of Elliott (2006) and Russell-Wood (1998) deserve special mention.

While considering the process of mutual and continuous influence between European empires in America, each empire cannot be studied as a separate entity. As Gould (2007, 726) has suggested, they should be studied as a "part of the same hemispheric system or community." A system that, for the period under consideration in this special issue, was profoundly asymmetrical, one in which the English-speaking Atlantic could be considered as a "Spanish periphery." This approach implies turning upside-down the traditional mental map established by Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* just before the mid-nineteenth century and, more importantly, permits broadening the scope to include the entirety of the Atlantic Ocean, where both the Ibero-American and the African-American Atlantic receive proper historiographical attention (Maxwell 1993).

In considering the interactions within and between American empires prior to 1800, Jack P. Greene's concept of negotiated authority was trailblazing. It stresses the importance of approaching institutional political developments from the perspective of the periphery instead of the center, which was the traditional orientation (Greene 1994). Local populations (both of European origin and Native Americans) had far more bargaining power than previously recognized. They were able to modify and, in some cases, resist what their putative rulers sought to impose on them. The negotiation of authority not only occurred in the realm of politics and public life, but also in common day-to-day practices where the local population would use, in the words of Certeau (1990, 54), resistance mechanisms which allowed them to be able to "metamorphose the dominant order," forcing it to function in another register. Approaches of this sort have yielded important insights for Spanish Atlantic History, including Abelardo Levaggi's book (2002) on *parlamentos* from Chile to Mexico, raising the question of to what degree institutional flexibility explains the durability of the Spanish empire. Such approaches have been supplemented (and complemented) by the influence of the historiography of empires beyond the Americas, including those pioneered by Frederick Cooper and also the historians associated with the "Subaltern School" of South Asian historiography (Cooper and Burbank 2010; Guha and Spivak 1988).

The political history of the c. 1750–1850 period, which encompasses the "Age of Revolutions," has benefited immensely from these new historiographical currents. Four areas deserve brief, specific mention: intellectual history; the dissolution of the Ibero-Atlantic empires; the role of slavery, together with the activities of free people of African descent and indigenous groups; and the reconstitution and reconfiguration of the Iberian empires after 1825.

It is hard to fathom that the political ideas of enlightenment and liberal periods in Spain was once little studied and, in some circles, much maligned. The past few decades have seen this earlier tendency corrected and even reversed. In particular, Spain's role as a progenitor of new-fangled ideas, and not merely a passive consumer of them, has been recognized. The early work of Capel, Sánchez, and Moncada (1988), Peset Reig (1987), Lafuente and Mazuecos (1987), Lucena-Giraldo (1993), and Solano Pérez-Lila (1999) showed how enlightenment era understandings of geography, natural history and cartography, which culminated in the scientific voyages, intersected with and informed political culture in the heyday of the Bourbon reforms, a topic the study of which is itself in the process of transformation (Andrien and Kuethe 2014). Scholarship on the scientific expeditions, the circulation of scientific knowledge and instruments,

and the foundation (and flourishing) of scientific institutions has proliferated, yielding important insights. The influence of Newton and Linnaeus in the development of physics, astronomy, and botany in the Spanish Atlantic is now incontrovertible (Hodacs, Nyberg, and Van Damme 2018).

In a similar spirit, Astigarraga (2003) and Paquette (2008), building on seminal contributions of Lluch (1973) and Llombart (1992), revealed the complex, polyphonous debates over political economy in late eighteenth-century Spain and how these ideas spilled out into the public sphere, debated vociferously in the ubiquitous *tertulias* and patriotic societies. More recently, the study of political languages and concepts has been transformed utterly by Javier Fernández Sebastián's "IberConceptos" project (2009, 2014), whose contributors span the Americas and the Iberian Peninsula. Fernández Sebastián has demonstrated that political concepts were transatlantic in scope, forged in a polycentric world characterized by intellectual crosspollination (Paquette 2013). Concurrently, the rich complexity of Ibero-Atlantic liberalism has received extensive treatment in the works of Posada-Carbó (2011), Posada-Carbó and Jaksic (2013), Breña (2006), Paquette (2015), and Alonso (2016), among others. All of these works have breathed fresh life into the history of political thought in the Iberian world.

Unsurprisingly, the revivification of the study of political ideas in the period c. 1750–1850 has coincided with, and served to propel, a revision of the Age of Revolutions. If R.R. Palmer (1959-1964) considered the Iberian World worthy merely of a few footnotes in his great two-volume study published in the early 1960s, a mere byproduct of the French Revolution, recent research has demonstrated how untenable such a position is. In part prompted by the bicentenary of the Napoleonic occupation of Spain and Portugal, and the bicentenary of Latin American independence, enormous scholarly energy has been devoted to re-assessing the heroic, teleological, nation-centric histories of Latin American independence. From the legal debates in the Cortes de Cádiz to the new military history of the Battle of Ayacucho, the result has been stunning revaluation, as the histories written by Guerra (1992), Annino (2014), Portillo (2006), Lucena-Giraldo (2010), McFarlane (2014), Morelli (2005), Gutíerrez Ardila (2010), Thibaud (2003), Pérez Vejo (2010), Brown (2012), Adelman (1999, 2006, 2008), Calderón and Thibaud (2006, 2010), and others have shown.

A third major recent historiographical development is attention to the centrality of slavery and race to political life of the Spanish-Atlantic World. To be sure, the historiography of slavery in colonial Latin America has a distinguished pedigree, the role of free people of color has been the subject of several important studies, and race and racism have not been neglected (Moreno Fraginals 1964; Knight 1970; Bowser 1974; Scott 1985; Schwartz 1986; Russell-Wood 1982; Reis 1995; Twinam 1999; Martínez 2008; Bethencourt 2013). But the centrality of race, slavery, and abolitionist sentiment to politics and political life has only recently been acknowledged and inscribed into standard narratives of the c. 1750–1850 period (though for notable exceptions see Bethell 1970; Murray 1980). The books of Helg (1995), Christopher Schmidt-Nowara (2011), Hill (2005), Naranjo Orovio (1996), Barcía (2008), Marcela Echeverri (2016), Twinam (2015), and Ferrer (1999, 2014) are indicative of the promise and innovative nature of this field, a field that has been bolstered by the new historiography on the Haitian Revolution. This new approach to slavery has questioned traditional assertions about the distinct (relative to other Atlantic empires) legal nature of this institution in the Spanish world, and also debunked

the old myth about the total dissociation between "law" and "practice" (de la Fuente 2004; Herzog 2013, 2015).

A final area of research (for the purposes of this brief survey) in the midst of historiographical renovation is the transformation of Spanish colonial empire after the "loss" of continental America. Prompted by the seminal work of Fradera (1999, 2005, 2015, 2018), the transition from early modern to "modern" empires is the subject of renewed and intensifying scholarly interest. This recent trend in historiography has shown how in the nineteenth-century Spain overhauled policies for its overseas territories that broke with its earlier imperial practices. By actively engaging with international scholarship on modern imperialism, historians have demonstrated that Spain differed little from its northern European neighbors in governing overseas possessions, extracting economic benefit, issuing exclusionary legislation, and participating in geopolitical contests for the domination of extra-European spaces. Nineteenth-century Spanish colonialism thus deserves to be incorporated into the larger historiographical debate about modern empires and their interrelation with liberal revolutions happening in Europe (McCoy, Fradera, and Jacobson 2012). The role of imperial rivalry, debates over "home rule," abolitionist sentiment, the revival of the slave trade and other, new forms of forced labor (e.g. the Chinese "Coolie Trade"), economic-political pressure exerted by colonial elites in metropolitan Spain, the survival of significant Spanish populations in the new American republics, and breaks and continuities with previous, pre 1825 policies, are among the topics of recent publications (Piqueras and Sebastiá 1991; Bahamonde and Cayuela 1992; Elizalde 1992; Casanovas 1998; Schmidt-Nowara 1999; Roldán de Montaud 2001; Martín Corrales 2002; Rodrigo 2007, 2016; Garcia-Balañà 2008, 2016; Jacobson 2009; Ruiz de Gordejuela Urquijo 2011; Fradera and Schmidt-Nowara 2013; Llobet 2014; Permanyer-Ugartemendia 2014).

The nine essays included in this JILAS dossier range widely, geographically and chronologically, unified by their common interest in exploring and reassessing the politics, political life, and political culture in the Spanish-Atlantic world in the c. 1750–1850 period. Among themes covered are: the political culture of African-descended boatmen (*bogas*) in New Granada; the Bourbon state's taxation policy toward free people of color in New Spain; slaves' use of the "legal ecology" of the Spanish empire; the politics of cartography in the Spanish Atlantic world; civil society institutions in Santafe de Bogotá (New Granada) before independence; aspects of Anglo-Spanish mutual (policy) emulation in the period of the Americas (U.S.) Revolution; the role of lawyers in the Iberian-Atlantic world, especially in the Age of Revolutions; the role of racial (and ethnic) categories in the political thought and practice of Liberal Spain; and the debates concerning Asian indentured labor in Cuba in the 1850s.

Note

1. This special issue emerges from a workshop held at The Johns Hopkins University in February 2017. The workshop was sponsored by the Department of History and the Program in Latin American Studies (PLAS).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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