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Connections after Colonialism: Europe and Latin America in the 1820s

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Matthew Brown and Gabriel Paquette's *Connections after Colonialism*, as stated in the excellent introduction, aims to test the limitations of, as well as open new possibilities within, the Atlantic History and Age of Revolutions paradigms through highlighting the continued yet readjusted relationships between Europe and Latin America in the 1820s. In doing so the editors are building on previous work that opens up new debates and tests received ideas and chronologies relating to the history of the Atlantic world and the Age of Revolutions and more specifically the place of Southern Europe and Latin America within those paradigms.(1) Paquette has edited a collection that took a fresh look at the Enlightenment and improvement by placing Latin America and Southern Europe at the centre of Atlantic History.(2) Brown brought experts together to reassess the usefulness of the idea of informal empire in Latin America.(3) Neither volume claimed to be a definitive study; instead they aimed to open the discussion.

The collection in question combines a number of erudite, thought-provoking and original studies that begin to reassess and reinvigorate the study of Atlantic History and the Age of Revolutions. Brown and Paquette

and their collaborators achieve this through a detailed analysis of the political changes in Europe and Latin America in the understudied yet pivotal decade of the 1820s. The chapters in the collection range from broad scholarly overviews to meticulously researched case studies all making original use of archival material some of which is used here for the first time. In highlighting continuities rather than focusing on rupture the studies clearly illustrate the nature of lasting connections between Iberia and the Americas in the wake of imperial collapse. They contest the idea that the direction of the international exchange of ideas and political, economic and cultural practices was north to south or European centre to Latin American periphery and include the revolutions of Latin American independence in the concept of the Age of Revolutions. Rather than seeing the 1820s as a moment in which nations of Europe and Latin America took divergent paths, the studies collected in this volume shine a light on continued but changed relationships between Europe and Latin America and the mutual influence in terms of political ideas, constitutionalism, trade and culture.

Brian Hamnett's overview of the changes in the period highlights the emergence of independent Ibero-American states as a significant innovation in international politics. Focusing on the distribution of power within the states, the fiscal relationship between their component parts, and the distribution of wealth within their territories Hamnett underlines the deep roots of the changes in internal politics and international realignments that took place in the 1820s in what he calls the 'successor states'. He traces the roots of apparent innovations such as the development of Mexican federalism, the formal incorporation of the 'successor states' trade into the international economy, and the shift from textile manufacture to export agriculture in Argentina, back to the late colonial period. He identifies the 1820s as being a period that incubated crucial debates over free-trade versus protectionism, federalism and centralism and processes of change that would run throughout the 19th century and, in some cases, into the 20th century. Hamnett places the Iberian revolutions of independence in their contemporary context of the weakening of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and the Mediterranean and compares the fall of the Iberian empires with later periods of imperial collapse. He argues that the Latin American revolutions of independence were not simply the result of the earlier revolutions in North America and France but had their own distinct contributions in terms of processes and ideas. They should be considered integral to the phenomenon of the Age of Revolutions.

Case studies in the collection serve to illustrate Hamnett's view of the formative nature of the 1820s. Scarlett O'Phelan Godoy's account of the life of the Chilean Bernardo O'Higgins identifies continuities with the colonial period as new dreams were confronted with limits and disillusionment. The influence of European thought on O'Higgins' policies did not lead to any major social or political change in Chile under him, although Godoy argues that the process of reform credited to later leaders such as Diego Portales was initiated in the 1820s, which she suggests were important formative years in the development of Chilean politics. Similarly, Ruben Zahler, through his discussion of attitudes to foreigners in Venezuela, suggests that the arrival of new actors on the political stage in the 1820s laid the foundations for more effective political change in the form of religious toleration in the 1830s. Jay Sexton's contribution, the only one to look specifically at the relationship between the North American Union and Latin America in the 1820s, analyses the roots of two opposing forms of US imperialism. The debates over James Monroe's 1823 address and the Panama Congress show how US foreign policy choices in this period were dictated by domestic concerns over an unstable union and the threat of secessionism. While US statesmen recognised the need to keep economic and cultural ties with the Old World they were concerned that Latin American states should not do the same with their former colonial masters after independence. They agreed that the union would be best preserved by the US establishing a dominant position on the American continent. Two schools of thought that stressed US hemispheric dominance developed in the 1820s, Sexton argues. 'The American system' saw involvement in the Panama Congress and internationalism as a way of defending the union against British neo-colonialism; it saw internationalism as the best way of protecting national interests. The alternative approach sought to secure the union and US dominance in the region through the pursuit of narrowly defined interests, especially expansionism. The latter would be the most influential for the rest of the century

The influence of political practices and constitutional ideas is an important theme. Will Fowler considers the

shared context of constitutional disarray, weak government and uncertain legitimacy in Spain and Mexico through the analysis of a new political practice, the *pronunciamiento*. He explores the influence of the *pronunciamiento* of Rafael Riego of 1820 that restored the Cádiz constitution and with it representative government on the process of the consummation of independence in Mexico between 1820 and 1821. Riego's *pronunciamiento* and the first Mexican *pronunciamiento* (the Plan de Iguala, which ushered in independence from Spain) established a successful formula for bringing about political change with no bloodshed. It was a process by which after a series of extra-constitutional uprisings and representations, liberal army officers or groups of citizens were able to establish themselves as representatives of the 'will of the people', and eventually, ideally establish a liberal constitutional agenda. Fowler describes parallel processes in Spain and Mexico by which this form of 'controlled revolution' became one of the most popular political practices in both Spain and Mexico, with the outcome that for the next 50 years the formation of stable, legitimate governments that were not forcefully challenged would prove elusive in both countries. Fowler's is not the only contribution to note the importance of the example of successful and 'controlled' revolutions in the exchange between European and American liberals. Maurizio Isabella's study of Italian exiles and Spanish American liberals emphasises the need to recognise the significant impact of revolutions of Spanish independence on non-radical democratic, federalist European liberalism. These revolutions influenced the Italian Risorgimento because they demonstrated that regime change and the defeat of reaction and political transformation was possible without the extreme violence of the French revolution. The dynamic Fowler describes is one of Spanish liberal influence on Mexico followed by parallel processes on either side of the Atlantic. Isabella on the other hand underlines the mutual nature of the exchange.

While Fowler's study looks at the liberals' need to create a new form of extra-constitutional politicking in order to adapt to the context of restored absolutism, Josep M. Fradera's contribution looks at how liberals adapted their ideas to the new reality of the significant reduction in colonial territories. Fowler's chapter looks at how Spanish liberal ideas and practices were influential in the New World, whereas Fradera considers liberals' reactions to the need to adapt to processes in the Americas that were beyond their control. His analysis of the way in which the ideas and policies of the Spanish liberals changed towards Latin America between the Triennio Liberal and the restoration of liberalism under the regency in 1837 as they adapted to a new period of colonialism for the reduced colonies in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines focuses on the changes in the economic project, trade reform and the issue of slavery and the slave trade. It analyses the necessary adjustments made to liberal policy to ensure the retention of the remaining colonies and to be accepted as a European liberal power.

Isabella demonstrates how, after the failure of the Italian revolutions of 1820 and 1821, the Italian liberal diaspora, through exchange with Spanish American and other European liberals became part of a trans-Atlantic and pan-European network of liberals and democrats or a 'transnational civil society'. They disseminated ideas of a new international order of self-determination and popular sovereignty and saw the fight for independence in the Americas as being the fight of civilization and freedom against the corrupt Ancien Regime. They helped to negotiate and create a new liberal culture. He emphasises the mutual nature of the exchange and analyses the effect of this exchange on both Spanish American and Italian patriotism and demonstrates the importance of European liberal ideas for the legitimization of the new governments in Guatemala and Mexico as well as the significance of Spanish America in European eyes as laboratories of liberalism. Isabella also looks the influence of the exchange between Italian and Mexican liberals on notions of patriotism in both regions. The readers' attention is drawn throughout to exchanges between Spanish American and Italian liberals with their counterparts in Spain, Paris and London and the chapter effectively makes the case for the development of a transatlantic history that takes a broader perspective than the current Anglo-American or Hispanic-American focus to look at networks of exchange throughout the Mediterranean, northern Europe and the Americas.

Gabriel Paquette looks not at extra-constitutional activities or the inspiration that European exiles gained from the Latin American experience but rather the direct influence of Brazilian constitutionalism on Portuguese politics. Through his analysis of the Brazilian origins of the Portuguese constitution of 1826, Paquette makes the case for mutual influence in the exchange of ideas between Europe and Latin America

more assertively than Isabella. His discussion of constitutions differs from the growing body of work about the influence of Spanish, US, French and British constitutionalism in Latin America in that it questions the idea that the general direction of the transmission of constitutional thought was from European centre to Latin American periphery.⁽⁴⁾ He demonstrates that the Latin American influence went beyond inspiring groups of disgruntled liberals and there was a far more symbiotic relationship between the Iberia and the Americas. Dom Pedro, Emperor of Brazil, heir to the Portuguese throne, and author of the 1826 Portuguese constitution that was an adaptation of the 1824 Brazilian constitution, was seen in Brazil as an enemy of constitutional government, the author of an anti-popular constitution and a possible figurehead of restored absolutism. Paradoxically, the constitution was received in Europe as a rallying cry for Portuguese liberals and their supporters overseas and seen as a threat to royal legitimacy. This study shows that Latin American politics had a sometimes destabilising influence in Europe and he underscores the need, not only for Latin Americanists to study European History to fully understand the period but also for historians of Europe to study Latin America.

In Matt Brown's concluding chapter the political careers of some of Bolívar's closest allies who, unlike 'The Liberator', survived well past the 1820s, are analysed. Bolívar was not unique among political leaders of his generation in being a member of the élite and follower of enlightenment ideas who, during the independence movements, backed radical revolutionary ideologies that apparently threatened the privileges of their class. These followers of Bolívar all eventually adopted more conservative political ideas and were prepared to develop close political and economic relationships with Britain or the US.

Along with political ideas, cultural and commercial influences are also discussed. Iona Macintyre looks at the influence of European culture on South America in the form of print culture, specifically the role of the catechisms for the education of girls and women. She describes a context in which the circulation of ideas about the education of women, seen as central to the development of modern societies, involved exchange throughout Europe with some reaching South America at the hands of the Spanish liberal José Joaquín de Mora. The texts expounded Eurocentric ideas. The authors of these texts and the educators who used them clearly saw the education of women in Latin America as a way of bringing European civilization to the American periphery. David Rock explores the relationship between the British merchant community in the River Plate and the reformist government of 1820-9 that was dominated by the liberal, Bernardino Rivadavia. He emphasizes the mutual influence or even mutual dependence of the British merchants and the regime. From the early 1820s the British sought to strengthen their influence in Buenos Aires but the incipient nature of the Argentine state meant the government had too little power outside Buenos Aires to guarantee concessions to new settlers. The decline of the regime towards the end of the decade coincided with the decline in Argentine tolerance of the British and a rise in Anglophobia. British enthusiasm for all things South American also turned to disillusionment. Formal diplomatic relations between Britain and the River Plate did not survive the 1820s. The study effectively demonstrates, along with those of Hamnett, Isabella, Fradera and Macintyre that the period witnessed the expansion of transatlantic networks of trade, print communication and utopianism.

We are reminded of colonial continuity with studies of the only territories in the region to resist independence, Cuba and Puerto Rico. Carrie Gibson analyses the way in which the fear of Haiti ensured continuities in the relationship between Spain and the colonies in Cuba and Puerto Rico. She demonstrates how the perpetuation of the myth of revolutionary Haiti served to ensure the continuity of the colonial relationship between Spain, Cuba and Puerto Rico. Although the Haitian government was struggling to deal with internal crisis and division the fear of the Haitian threat combined with the economic opportunity provided by reduced agricultural production in Haiti, ensured the continuity of the relationship between Spain and its remaining American colonies. It also ensured the continuity of slavery and the slave trade. Christopher Schmidt-Nowara's analysis of the intellectual arguments that Cuban planters and their critics used to discuss slavery shows how, despite the supposed end of slave trafficking in a treaty with the British in 1820, the decade until 1830 saw a dramatic increase in the slave trade and a flourishing plantation economy. He highlights the contradictory processes of the 1820s when, just as some areas of Spanish America were freed from colonial domination and the slave trade was abolished internationally, others

witnessed increased imperial control and with it the largest rise in plantation slavery in the history of the Atlantic system with Cuba becoming the largest slave society in Spanish America. Through his discussion of the way in which the ideas and writings of Bartolomé de las Casas were used by both the defenders and opponents of slavery in Cuba, Schmidt-Nowara demonstrates that the Cuban experience should not only be interpreted as one of continuity due to the perpetuation of slavery, but also one of change due to shifting attitudes and the rise in opposition to slavery in the 19th century. Opposition came in the form of slave rebellions, increased pressure from Britain but most significantly for the argument here, from the Spaniards and Spanish Americans who used Casas to argue for the restoration of Spain's historic distance from the slave trade.

Schmidt-Nowara aptly refers to the 1820s as an 'axial age' and this speaks to the central theme of the book. The 1820s saw the disintegration but not the total collapse of the Iberian empires, the formation of sovereign states throughout Latin America and a change in the imperial balance of power from Southern to Northern Europe. The roots of congress politics as well as many of the political issues that would define the development of the new polities and societies of Latin America and Europe can be found in the 1820s. All of the contributions emphasise continuity and change rather than rupture and emphasise mutual influence in the connections between Europe and Latin America. The cumulative effect is a nuanced analysis of the evolution and the restructuring of the networks and relationships between the Old and the New Worlds in the 1820s through a particular focus on transatlantic liberalism, Anglo-American involvement in Latin America, transnational connections between people and ideas and the transformations of slavery and the slave trade. The importance of international events and transnational actors in the collapse of the Iberian Atlantic empires is clearly illustrated as are the influence of those networks on the realignment of the powers and the economic, social, political and intellectual changes that emerged in the pivotal decade of the 1820s. It is clear from these rich, new studies that ties between Europe and the Americas were not severed but rather the nature of the relationship was renegotiated. *Connections after Colonialism* constitutes a significant contribution to a growing body of historical research that emphasises the persistence of links between Europe and Latin America in the wake of Latin American independence. It should inspire researchers to move beyond the boundaries of a nation-based or area studies-based analysis of the processes of change in the early nineteenth-century and to reassess the 1820s as a key decade in the cultural, political and intellectual evolution of Europe and Latin America in the Age of Revolutions.

Notes

1. An earlier collaboration on the theme is; Matthew Brown and Gabriel Paquette, 'Europe and Latin America in the 1820s?', *European History Quarterly*, Special Issue, 41, 3 (2011).[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. Gabriel Paquette, *Enlightened Reform in Southern Europe and its Atlantic Colonies, c. 1750-1830. Empires and the Making of the Modern World Series* (Farnham and Burlington, VT, 2009).[Back to \(2\)](#)
3. Matthew Brown, *Informal Empire in Latin America: Culture, Commerce and Capital* (Oxford, 2008).[Back to \(3\)](#)
4. See, for example, Jaime E. Rodríguez O., *The Independence of Spanish America* (Cambridge, 1998); Francisco A. Eissa Barroso, *Revolución, independencia y la nuevas naciones de América* (Madrid, 2005) or Francisco A. Eissa Barroso, 'Mirando hacia Filadelfia desde Anáhuac: La Constitución estadounidense en el Congreso Constituyente mexicano de 1823-24?', *Política y Gobierno*, 17, 1 (2010), 97-125.[Back to \(4\)](#)

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[1] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/63454>