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## Independence Movements in the Americas during the Age of Revolution

### Abstract

This essay gives an overview of the four independence movements or revolutions that took place in the Americas during the last quarter of the 18th century to the first quarter of the next one (that is, *c.* 1775-1825): the independence of the Thirteen Colonies, the emancipatory and independence process of Haiti, the Spanish American revolutions, and the political process that ended up in the independence of Brazil. Contrary to what some Atlantic and global historians have suggested in the past few years, the peculiarities of each one of these processes impedes, or at least notably complicates, any effort of homogenizing them or of finding patterns or sequences among them. In this regard, chronological proximity may be misleading; proximity does not imply causality. Contacts and connections were present throughout the hemisphere during those fifty years, no doubt, but as always with academic trends (that may also be academic vogues), these contacts and connections should be taken with caution and discernment.

**Keywords:** Independence movements, the Americas, Age of Revolution

## I. Introductory remarks and methodological issues

The independence movements in the Americas belong to what historians call the “Age of Revolution”. This is a historiographic category that, as any other, has received varying periodizations. However, if our main concern is the independence movements in the American continent, then it would be safe to choose the half century that goes from 1775 to 1825 as the best chronological option. Of course, events and processes that took place before should be studied in order to fully understand the four movements that are the object of analysis in this essay and that will be dealt with in section II. As mentioned in the abstract, these are (in chronological order): the independence process of the Thirteen Colonies (1776-1783); the emancipation movement and eventual independence of Haiti (1791-1804); the *revoluciones hispánicas*, (that is, not only the Spanish American revolutions, but also the political revolution that took place in metropolitan Spain between 1808 and 1814); and, finally, the political transformations that Brazil experienced from 1808 until it declared its independence in 1822.

The Spanish American independence processes ended, in principle, with the battle of Ayacucho (December 9th, 1824). This battle meant the independence of what was the geographical heart of the Viceroyalty of Peru, the last continental territory of the Spanish Empire in America that was still under the control of the Spanish Crown. However, several historical events that took place afterwards can also be chosen as closing dates for the Spanish American independence movements: there were still some skirmishes in the Viceroyalty of Peru during 1825; several important Spanish American ports remained under control of royalist troops until 1826; Bolivia was created that same year; Uruguay became a new country in 1828; and, finally, what historians call “Gran Colombia” disintegrated into three different new countries (Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador) in 1830, the same year that Simón Bolívar died. These few examples are mentioned just to show the ever-open possibility of changing the closing date of the emancipatory-independence processes that took place in Spanish America during the first three decades of the 19th century, depending on the field of specialization of the historian and the hypothesis and objectives of the research in question. Of course, the same applies not only to the closing date of any other historic process, but also to its date of origin.

This calendrical openness is even more evident in the case of the Spanish American independence movements when compared with the other processes considered in this essay because these took place in the geographical vastness of what we call today “Latin America”. By the beginning of the 19th century, the Spanish Empire in America was divided in four viceroyalties and three general captaincies. This means that the independence movement(s) in Spanish America was not a single event, but in fact included at least seven different revolutions, with different social backgrounds, different economies and, therefore, different urgencies and different

*tempos*. Just to give an idea, Venezuela declared its independence in 1811, Paraguay became effectively independent in 1813, the United Provinces of the River Plate (Argentina) declared their independence in 1816 (though it could be said that they were autonomous since 1807) and Chile did the same in 1818. The insurgents of New Spain (Mexico) declared independence in 1813, but it was not until 1821 that this independence materialized (by Agustín de Iturbide, who for almost a decade was one of the most decided enemies of the insurgents in the Viceroyalty of New Spain). Peru declared its independence for the first time in 1821, but it was not until 1824 that it was able to sever ties with the metropole (this achievement, on the other hand, would have been impossible without the active participation of Spanish American troops from other territories; in fact, the vast majority of the Peruvian elite and the Peruvian people did not wish to separate from Spain). The Brazilian case is different in so many aspects *vis-à-vis* the Spanish American movements, that it will receive a specific treatment at the end of section II. In fact, the protagonists of the Brazilian process never had the intention to become independent, until the political situation in Portugal made that decision inevitable. Besides, this process was not only much less violent than the Spanish American movements, but had slavery as a common thread that determined events in a way that cannot be compared with the movements in question. Finally, coming back to the parts in which this essay is divided, in section III the concept of “revolution” and the “connectivity” of the independence processes will be discussed.

As it will become evident below, there were some political and ideological aspects that were common to all the Spanish American territories (to the extent that they were part of a single empire during almost three centuries), but some of the most distinctive features of their respective emancipation movements are linked more than anything else to geopolitical motives, with certain individuals that played extraordinary roles at specific junctures and, finally, with social aspects that did not depend and were not necessarily altered by the political and ideological commonalities just mentioned. The vast majority of the main political leaders of the emancipation movements of Spanish America had studied in one of the several universities that existed in the region, so they shared a similar intellectual background. However, some of them at one time or another had had contact with books that were not part of the curricula of the Spanish American universities or that were forbidden by the Inquisition. As some recent scholarship has demonstrated (Torres Puga 2010), the possibilities to read literature of this kind varied a lot depending on several aspects, but it was always there for those really interested in doing so and that had the means to materialize this interest. In this regard, the Enlightenment and some of its main notions were considered for a very long time as the breeding ground for the revolutionary movements that ignited Spanish America from 1810 onwards. However, the intellectual history that has developed in Western academia during the last decades is much more skeptical about the links that were established for very long between the Enlightenment and the Age of Revolution. Simplifying this issue, it can

be said that the main reason behind this change is that ideas are viewed nowadays as much more situated, complex and ambiguous than they once were, and the Enlightenment is now perceived as a more nuanced, variegated and international movement, not as an almost exclusively French *coterie* of revolutionary intellectuals. If the links between the French Enlightenment and the French Revolution have been played down by well-known historians in the last years (see, for example, Chartier), similar conclusions can be arrived at when we analyze in more detail, for example, the purported “influence” of Rousseau on the Spanish American independence movements. Paradoxical as it may sound, the presence of Rousseau in Spanish America during the Age of Revolution appears to have been much less revolutionary than once thought.

Although it took place in the western part of a small island of the Caribbean, the plurality of situations, or regionalization, was also a characteristic of the Haitian emancipation process. The small size of Saint Domingue (that part of the island originally called *La Española* that roughly corresponds to modern Haiti) notwithstanding, three very distinctive processes took place there between 1791 and 1804, when Haiti obtained its independence. The peculiar character of each region depended more than anything else on its geographic location, on the traditional relation that each region had established with the mother country (France), and on the social composition and social leadership that guided the insurrection against the white planters in each part of the island throughout those thirteen years. Another element that also played an important role in the Haitian Revolution was the active involvement of the two other European powers of the time, England and Spain.

As already mentioned, the process that resulted in Brazilian independence will be dealt with at the end of section II. What happened in Brazil between 1808 and 1822 was not an independence movement as such, mainly because, as will be explained later in this essay, the relocation of the Portuguese king, his government and his court in Rio de Janeiro in 1808 modified the whole political Brazilian situation in a radical way and made the search for “independence”, if not an impossibility, at least a far-fetched scenario for the majority of Brazilian landowners, the powerful social group that, with the Portuguese king living in Brazil, did not consider the possibility of any revolutionary movement (be it linked or not with independence). With the thousands and thousands of slaves living and toiling in Brazil, the landowners, the king, and the Brazilian authorities in general knew very well that notions like “revolution” or “independence” were to be kept at bay. Estimations vary rather drastically, but it would be safe to say that at around 1820 there were almost two million slaves in Brazil and by 1850 this figure had risen to close to three million. To give an idea of the magnitude of Brazilian slavery, it would suffice to mention that from the beginning of the 17th century until the end of slavery in the United States in 1865, almost ten times more African slaves were sent to Brazil than to the US. Historically speaking, in the Americas slavery was eminently a Brazilian affair (the traffic of slaves towards Brazil was started by the Portuguese since the middle

of the 16th century). It may be added that the study of slavery in Brazil has grown exponentially in the last twenty-five years (Reis and Klein).

There are other aspects that should be mentioned before proceeding. First, there are some important academic issues that are relevant for the hemispheric approach like the one intended here. Leaving aside the study of the independence processes in the United States, the other two, the Haitian Revolution and Spanish American independence movements, were in general terms neglected by Western academia until fairly recently. The former until the 1990s and the latter until the 1980s. Among the most important contributions to the history of the Haitian Revolution since the 1990s are those made by Carolyn Fick, David Geggus, Laurent Dubois, and Jeremy Popkin, but many other authors have contributed to this flourishing bibliography that now includes a highly useful encyclopedia, edited by François Roc, that covers every aspect of the process. In the case of Spanish America in particular, and the *revoluciones hispánicas* in general, the main figure is the Franco-Spanish historian François-Xavier Guerra (*Modernidad e independencias* and *Figuras de la modernidad*), but other authors like Brian Hamnett, Jaime Rodríguez, Antonio Annino, José María Portillo and Javier Fernández Sebastián, not to mention several Latin American historians devoted to their respective national history, have contributed to make them one of the most vibrant fields of study during the whole Age of Revolution. In any case, the bibliographic difference between the independence of the Thirteen Colonies and other revolutionary processes that the Americas witnessed during that age is still considerable. This fact clearly impacts the amount of available scholarly material that exist at present to study the Haitian, Spanish American, and Brazilian cases. In other words, the extant bibliography on the Independence of the Thirteen Colonies is vastly superior to the others. However, it is important to insist that this trend is currently changing at a remarkable pace.

As always with drastic changes in academic orientation and areas of study that become of interest, we have to trace their origin to contemporary political and social issues. In the case of Spanish America, it was in the beginning of the 1980s that several Latin American countries started to become democracies, after more or less prolonged periods of military rule. This means that in Latin America the end of the Cold War accentuated a trend that already existed. The final result is that in the second decade of the 21st century, and without ignoring the enormous challenges regarding central aspects like the rule of law, poverty and social inequality, all of the Latin American countries, except Cuba and arguably Venezuela, can be considered “liberal democracies”. In the case of Haiti, the rise and development of multiculturalism and a growing awareness in Western academia against any kind of Eurocentrism or even “Western-centrism” fostered academic agendas centered in topics that until then had been neglected, among them the Haitian Revolution. This does not mean that important books were not written on the subject before the 1990s (to mention just one seminal title, C.L.R. James’ *The Black Jacobins* dates

back to 1938), but that the bibliography on the Haitian Revolution has developed exponentially since then. In this regard, it should be added that the 1990s development of social and cultural history that Western historiography has evinced during the last half century (a topic to which we will return later regarding Latin American academia) also played a role in the increasing academic production and sophistication regarding the Haitian, Spanish American and Brazilian independence movements.

Another academic aspect that explains the attention that these movements have received during the last decades is Atlantic History or, more specifically, the Atlantic approach to the Age of Revolution. The four Atlantic Revolutions *par excellence* are the independent movements that will be reviewed in this essay (excluding the Brazilian emancipation) plus the French Revolution. Nowadays, the Atlantic Revolutions cannot be studied without dealing in the first place with the independence of the Thirteen Colonies, but also with what happened in Saint Domingue between 1791 and 1804 and with what transpired in Spanish America between 1808 and 1824 (Klooster). Atlantic History, as well as global history, have therefore changed dramatically the scope and the contents of the Age of Revolution. At present, the emancipation process of the Thirteen Colonies has to be viewed and considered along with two other movements that took place several years later, both of which involved very different societies and had peculiar causes and consequences, but that are also a part of a period of Western history that radically transformed politics and, along with it, social and cultural principles and values. In fact, if there was an era where political modernity was born, it was during the Age of Revolution. Of course, there was still a very long way to go once this Age ended (be it 1825, or 1830, or 1848). In fact, political modernity is, by definition, a never-ending process; however, as an Atlantic historian writes, with those revolutions “the basis for modern systems had been laid” (Ordahl Kupperman 121).

Atlantic History has made fundamental contributions in topics like commercial exchanges, migrations and slavery, among others, but in the field of political history and especially of political history in revolutionary times, it seems that its most significant contributions are still to be made. This in part has to do with the inherent tendency of Atlantic historiography to insist upon and underline continuities, coincidences, and sequences. This is a methodological *caveat* that has been noted by some of the most distinguished cultivators of Atlantic History. For example, Bernard Bailyn has warned about the tendency of the Atlantic approach to “exaggerat[e] similarities and parallels unrealistically” (Bailyn, *Atlantic History* 62). This is a point that Atlantic historians should heed to, for, as Lester D. Langley writes in the introduction to his book *The Americas in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1850*: “A study oblivious to the nuances of the particular and to the parallel complexities that an awareness of place can inspire...can be sadly lacking in explanatory power.” (Langley 7)



## II. Emancipations, independences, and political transformations

Our historic itinerary starts with the war that changed the course of Western history like perhaps no other during the 18th century, that is the Seven Years War (1756-1763), and ends in 1830, the year when Simón Bolívar died. Bolívar was, no doubt, the most important military and political leader of the Spanish American independence movements, but at the same time, he was the most perspicuous analyst of what was at stake in those movements and the most acute analyst of what took place in the region between 1810 and 1830. The hundreds of documents, official and private, that he wrote or dictated during his lifetime dealt with the most important political, social and cultural aspects behind a conflict against the metropole that ended up in ways that he not only profoundly disapproved of, but in several aspects were the confirmation of his worst dreams. In a certain sense, his death is the most appropriate epitaph to the Spanish American revolutions.

Historians tend to concur that no other conflict influenced the revolutions that occurred in the Americas between 1775 and 1825 as much as the Seven Years War, known in North America as “The French and Indian War”. England came out triumphant and from that moment on it was clear that France would not be able to stop the military, naval, and commercial development of her eternal rival. In the Americas, at the end of the war the French could only keep some insular possessions. The French Crown lost an enormous continental territory of what today is Eastern Canada. Spain entered late into the conflict on the French side, but the capture of Manila and especially of the port of Havana by the British in 1762 was a terrible blow to the Spaniards. In fact, if a single event had to be chosen as the main motive behind the economic, military, and administrative overhauling of the Spanish Empire during the last decades of the 18th century (known as the “Bourbon Reforms”), this would be the temporary loss of Havana, the main Spanish port in the Caribbean. This sea, relatively small in geographic terms, was in a sense the fulcrum of the Atlantic world, due to its geopolitical, military, and commercial importance. Legal and illegal trade in the Caribbean can be considered the economic axis of the Atlantic World.

The king of England at that time, George III, as well as his advisors, thought that one of the means through which the Crown could recuperate the large amount of money spent during the Seven Years War would be taxing the North American colonies. Just one year after the war ended, these intentions were put into practice with the Sugar Act of 1764. Once started and notwithstanding the negative reactions of the colonists, the efforts to increase the revenues of the king continued with the Stamp Act (1765), the Townshend Acts (1767) and the Tea Act (1773). The violent reaction of the colonists to measures of this kind led to the Boston “Massacre” (in fact, the number of civilian casualties was relatively small: five) and then to the Coercive Acts of 1774. These actions led twelve of the thirteen colonies (Georgia did not participate) to elect

representatives and send them to the First Continental Congress, that gathered in Philadelphia that same year in order to decide the measures that would be taken to counter the intentions of the British Crown.

The situation kept deteriorating and the first direct confrontations between the British army and the armed colonists took place in Lexington and Concord in April of 1775. The Second Continental Congress gathered just one month after these engagements and two of its main decisions were to create a Continental Army and to put George Washington at the head of it. From that moment on, open war with the British was almost inevitable. The Declaration of Independence was a bit more than a year away: on July 4th, 1776, the Constitutional Convention that had gathered in Philadelphia since the month of May of that same year decided to declare to the world the birth of the United States of America. Seven long years of war against the most powerful empire of the time and the best navy in the world were ahead for the colonists.

After overcoming adverse conditions of every kind, among them an army that lacked not only material things but also basic training, Washington's strategy to avoid a major confrontation with the British army revealed its efficacy. In 1777 he obtained a very important victory in Saratoga and four years later, in Yorktown, he sealed the victory for the patriots. In 1783, the British Crown recognized in the Treaty of Paris the independence of the United States of America. That the King, George III, could have continued the war against the "rebels" is out of question, but his advisors realized that the cost would have been enormous, not only in economic terms. The victory of the patriots, on the other hand, would have been impossible without the support they received from three European nations: France, Spain and the Netherlands (especially the French Crown, that spent a considerable amount of money in order to avenge its defeat in the Seven Years War; the debt in which it incurred was one of the most important motives of the French Revolution). In any case, with victory came the titanic task of supplying the new country with the political institutions that would enable the birth and continuity of the biggest republic of the modern world.

The Articles of the Confederation, drafted in 1777 by representatives from the thirteen colonies and ratified until 1781, very soon showed its limitations. The main problem was the weakness of the federal government. To solve this and other shortcomings, a new Constitution had to be drafted. This document, elaborated by the Philadelphia Convention in 1787, was ratified the next year. Its longevity, reaching our days, is the most telling argument regarding the political deftness, institutional *finesse* and historical vision of its authors (among them, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Gouverneur Morris, and John Dickinson). Its greatest weakness from a social perspective was, no doubt, the fact that it maintained slavery, an institution that was evidently at odds with the lofty principles of the Declaration of Independence. In the words of a contemporary historian regarding slavery, the 1787 Constitution was "a bitter mockery" (Countryman 228). However, it was during the revolutionary period that the



bases upon which slavery rested were profoundly put into question by certain individuals and by some religious groups. In this regard, an everlasting historiographic issue emerges, the capacity or incapacity of certain persons to altogether transcend their historic contexts. In the opinion of one of the best American historians of this period, very often this attitude can be considered an example of historiographic ingenuity (Bailyn, “Central Themes”).

The defeat of the British against the North-American colonists made some people think that the British supremacy was faltering. However, the United Kingdom was able to overcome this defeat and this territorial loss in North America with notable speed, regained its supremacy and very quickly imposed itself as the arbiter not only of diplomacy in Europe, but also in several other parts of the world. The speed and magnitude of this recovery, unintelligible without the Industrial Revolution that was reshaping England at that very moment, gives an idea of the economic, naval and political advantage that Britain had gained over its erstwhile contenders.

The French Revolution can be considered the most disruptive event in the modern history of Europe. During the ten years it lasted (1789-1799) the whole continent suffered dire consequences, among them a political explosion of new principles, values, and ideas that radically changed not only the European political landscape, but also the political and ideological arsenal in the entire Western world. What followed, that is, Napoleon Bonaparte’s rise to power and empire, would be even more disruptive in military and social terms for the continent. After his demise in 1815, Europe and America were wholly transformed or were in the process of being transformed, albeit for different motives and with different intensities. As part of the turmoil provoked by the French Revolution, the colony of Saint Domingue, by far the most productive of all the European colonies in the Americas, was the stage for what could be considered the only *social* revolution that took place in the Americas during the Age of Revolution. This is not to say that either the independence of the United States or the Spanish American emancipation movements did not have revolutionary aspects or consequences. Of course they did. However, these aspects were much more political than social. In the case of the Haitian Revolution, what took place was the most radical social change that had ever taken place in the history of Western civilization: all of the slave owners that were in control of the island in political, social, and economic terms were either killed or forced to leave Saint Domingue.

When Haiti declared independence on the first day of the year 1804, at the forefront of its revolution stood Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a former slave. The expression “the world turned upside down” has been used mostly to refer to the English Revolution of the mid-17th century. However, it may be said that it is more aptly applied to what happened in the Saint Domingue between 1791 and 1804. Not only because it was the first successful rebellion led by slaves in the history of the Western world, but also because its final result was the creation of a radically free, non-slavery country.

The emancipation movement of Saint Domingue is one of the most complex revolutionary processes that has ever taken place in the course of modern history. To begin, until 1802, it was not an independence movement but an internal conflict among the whites, the free colored and the black slaves, with volatile allegiances *vis-à-vis* the French King, the French Republic and its envoys (who, on the other hand, were not always on the same side). To complicate things even more, as already mentioned, the war was not only a war by the slaves against the French, but also an international war in which Spain and Great Britain actively participated. Finally, the emancipation process that swept the western part of the island of *La Española* can be divided in at least three identifiable regions: the province of the North, the province of the West, and the province of the South. It was only the movement in the northern province that was led by black slaves, but not even there can we talk of a fight for independence before 1802. It was the decision that Napoleon took that same year to restore slavery that finally united the different factions against the French. With the invaluable help of mosquitoes and yellow fever, the Napoleonic army was defeated and independence was finally declared in 1804. Unity, however, would also be ephemeral: a few years later Haiti would divide itself into two different regimes: a kingdom with a black king in the North and a republic, led by a mulatto, in the South. Unification would not come until 1820. If political beginnings were complicated, exactly the same can be said of the economic aspects that characterized the first years and even decades after independence. In this sense, two elements would suffice to give an idea of the level of adversity the new nation had to face: the opposition and diplomatic non-recognition by the United States (this recognition had to wait until 1862) and the indemnity that the French government demanded from the Haitian government in 1825 in order to recognize its independence. This evident abuse on the part of the French government created a debt that directly hindered the development of Haiti until it finally was able to fully pay it in 1893.

The Haitian emancipation process started in August 1791 as a well-coordinated revolt throughout the northern plain of Saint Domingue. At that time, the French Colony was inhabited by around 500,000 slaves, 32,000 whites and 28,000 free colored residents. In the first part of the “Haitian Revolution” it was this last group that fought for a series of rights *vis-à-vis* the white population while still maintaining slavery. At first, the French government in Paris, that, it should be remembered, was still a monarchy, decided to send troops to crush the insurrection. One of its leaders stood out since the beginning: his name was Toussaint Bréda, but a couple of years into the insurrection he changed his name to Toussaint Louverture.

In September 1792, France became a republic and the Civil Commissioners originally sent by the former king (Léger Félicité Sonthonax and Étienne Polverel) were now representatives of a republican government beleaguered by several European armies. In Saint Domingue, the Spanish army, that controlled the eastern side of *La Española*, supported the rebels against the

French. In September of 1793 the British invaded the island and took control of some parts of the western and southern provinces. Feeling menaced not only by the black rebels, but also by the new governor sent from France (Thomas François Galbaud), his allies (the white planters), and the Spanish and the British, Sonthonax decided to declare the end of slavery in the northern province on August 24th, 1793. Ploverel did the same soon after in the western and southern provinces. On February 4th of the following year the National Convention in Paris ratified the Commissioners' decision. The reaction of the planters to the new situation was to call the British to their support. This decision would have lasting consequences: the British would stay in the island until 1798.

Meanwhile, Louverture had become an official in the Spanish Army that was supporting the rebels in their fight against France. His political and military ability gave him increasing reputation and power. He left the Spanish in 1794 and once the abolition of slavery was confirmed, joined the French army led by Sonthonax. However, their relationship soon began to deteriorate. By 1797, Louverture managed to force Sonthonax to return to the metropolis. He proved an able negotiator both with the British and the Americans. By the end of the decade he had control of almost all of Saint Domingue; the only exception being the southern province, that was under the control of André Rigaud, a mulatto (a social group that Louverture always disliked). In the middle of 1799, the best and most violent of his lieutenants, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, invaded the southern peninsula. After a year of war, Louverture was finally able to wrest control of the whole of Saint Domingue. In 1802, he even defeated the Spanish and took control of the eastern part of the island. Quite remarkably, within a decade of violence, civil war, open conflict against the French authorities (either monarchic or republican), international war, internecine conflicts, defections of every kind, international treaties and other examples of a notable political ability, Toussaint Louverture gained control not only of the whole of Saint Domingue, but also of the entire island of *La Española*.

The next step that Louverture took was not military, but political: to draft a Constitution. This document did not proclaim independence and although it did confirm the abolition of slavery, it also contained several dispositions forcing former slaves to go back to the plantations. Toussaint's reputation among his countrymen dropped heavily, but he saw no other way to maintain Saint Domingue's economy. This political decision taken by Louverture was the step that more than any other decided his future and ultimately his fate: in less than a year after the Constitution was promulgated, a French army of more than 20,000 men, under the command of Charles-Victor Emmanuel Leclerc, Napoleon's brother-in-law, landed in Saint Domingue. Some of Louverture's generals surrendered without firing a shot, but others put up a strong resistance; among them, Dessalines. However, by the spring of 1802, the French army was able to control almost the whole of Saint Domingue. In the end, Louverture had to surrender and all of his generals went

over to the French side. Furthermore, several of them helped Leclerc's army fight against the guerrillas that had decided to continue the war. In June of 1802, the French deceived Louverture and put him in prison. He was sent to France and was locked in a fort located in the Jura mountains. Toussaint Louverture died on April 7th, 1803. Until the very end of his life, Louverture kept writing to Bonaparte in amical terms, mainly showing surprise at his imprisonment (he never received an answer) and until the end he kept thinking that Saint Domingue could be part of France – presupposing, of course, that the abolition of slavery would be maintained by Napoleon (Louverture, 2014). This was not the case, however, for the First Consul had given the secret order to Leclerc to reinstall slavery in Saint Domingue as soon as he could.

When the slaves and former slaves realized the true motive behind Leclerc's expedition and when they heard similar news coming from Paris, the final war against the French army proved inevitable. For the first time since the turmoil and violence had started in Saint Domingue (that is, since August 1791), all the different races, groups, and factions gathered against the common enemy. Incredible as it may seem considering the hideous violence that took place during the first stages of the insurrection, the bloodiest part of the Haitian Revolution was still to come. During 1802 and 1803, unspeakable atrocities were committed by both sides. As mentioned, yellow fever took its toll among the French; Leclerc himself was in fact one of its victims. At the same time, the self-proclaimed "armée indigène" fought fiercely against what remained of the original Napoleonic army. Not even the divisions among several insurgent generals helped prevent a French defeat. Consequently, a large part of the French army abandoned Port-au-Prince in October. The final battle took place in Vertières on November 18th, 1803, following which General Rochambeau, Leclerc's successor, finally surrendered.

What definitely tipped the balance in favor of the indigenous army was the renewal of the war between France and England. By the spring of 1803 the Napoleonic dream of recuperating the French economic fountainhead in the Caribbean had crushed. The emperor-to-be immediately realized that without Saint Domingue and with the renewal of the war with the British, its remaining continental territories in America were now meaningless. At the end of the month of April, a treaty was signed between Napoleon and President Jefferson through which Louisiana became part of the United States. From one day to the next and for only 15 million dollars, the United States had more than doubled its territory (in approximately 828,000 square miles). Paradoxically, the Louisiana Purchase, that was a consequence of the triumph of anti-slavery in Saint Domingue, would turn into an enormous territory where slavery would develop for more than sixty years after the signing of a deal that made President Jefferson tremendously popular.

In the end, after more than a decade of warfare, around 40,000 French and allied troops (mainly Polish) had lost their lives in Saint Domingue. In November 1803 Dessalines and some of his generals drafted an initial proclamation of independence, but it was the document issued

by Dessalines himself on January 1st, 1804 that became the official declaration of independence of the new country, Haiti (Geggus, “Declaración de Independencia”). Sixteen months after that, Dessalines publicized a written Constitution that abolished slavery and that declared that all citizens, of all races, had equal rights. At the same time, he declared himself emperor. Less than a year and half afterwards, the greatest hero of the war against the French, the person who decided that Saint Domingue had to be independent and the father of the Haitian nation was ambushed and killed by conspirators paid by some of Dessalines’ generals. This happened in October of 1806. By that time, his ambition, excesses and cruelty had already made him a hated figure.

Of the four Atlantic revolutions that took place in the Americas between 1775 and 1825 (including Brazil), it can be argued that the Haitian Revolution was the most revolutionary of them all. The reason is simple: none other ended slavery, that millenary institution that was the antithesis not only of natural rights, but also of some of the core values of the Enlightenment and some of the main political and social notions of modernity that the Age of Revolution had engendered. The crucial role of the Haitian Revolution in the history of Western civilization, however, has resulted in idealizations of a movement that, considering the political institutions put in place by Haiti’s “Founding Fathers”, cannot be considered one of the forerunners of political modernity. In the words of a contemporary expert on the Haitian Revolution: “Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and Henry Christophe [king of the northern part of Haiti between 1807 and 1811], the main leaders who rose from slavery, were unashamedly dictatorial in their politics, as each of their constitutions make clear.” (Geggus, “Haitian Revolution” 547). Other historians are increasingly aware of the obstacles to turn the Haitian Revolution into a sort of symbol or pinnacle of modernity in the Atlantic Revolutions in general. The victory of the Saint Domingue slaves and the creation of Haiti are historic events of the utmost significance for Western history, but the metamorphosis of the Haitian Revolution into a model of political modernity with the power to exert great influence on the whole Western world during the Age of Revolution is a conclusion that should be avoided (Covo).

The links between the Haitian Revolution and other emancipation movements in Spanish America are hard to establish, even in the regions where there was a considerable presence of slaves. As Marixa Lasso writes regarding the region of New Granada: “It is difficult to assess the influence the French and Haitian Revolutions had on local *pardos* and slaves in the region of Cartagena... [I]n spite of Spanish fears, the Haitian example did not result in a major slave revolt.” (Lasso 33). What is more, during the Spanish American emancipation movements, the Haitian Revolution served as a counter-example that had to be avoided at all costs. The main reason is simple: an upheaval of such might would radically modify social hierarchies and this was the last thing that the *criollos* (the white elites born in the continent) wanted.

Regardless of the vast historiography that up to this day keeps insisting in the animosity

that the Bourbon reforms of the second half of the 18th century had supposedly created between *criollos* and peninsulars, the truth is that the closeness of different kinds between these two groups provided the social understanding and the cement that held the Spanish Empire together in a relatively smooth way for almost three centuries. Frictions between *criollos* and peninsulars existed since the 16th century, no doubt, but recent historiography has shown that these frictions were blown out of proportion by Latin American nationalist historiographies. In the words of Mark A. Burkholder “Despite repeated allegations to the contrary, the number of elite creoles genuinely hostile toward peninsulars was rarely large prior to 1808-1810.” (2013, xiv-xv)

It is true that starting in 1765 uprisings of different kinds and different intensity began to take place in several parts of the Spanish Empire in America (interestingly, the year coincides with the first serious social unrest in the Thirteen Colonies). The most important among these uprisings, after the one that occurred in Quito in 1765, was one led by Tupac Amaru in the Viceroyalty of Peru in 1780-1781. Nonetheless, if we consider the geographic expanse of the Spanish territories in America and the scant presence of royal troops throughout the region during the most part of the colonial period (Spanish troops were not noticeable in the Viceroyalty of New Spain until the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767), it is difficult not to conclude that the Spanish Crown and its inseparable ally, the Catholic Church, were tremendously effective regarding the cooptation and control that they were able to exercise over the vast majority of the Spanish American population.

This control started to crumble in 1808. The reason behind this shift was an invasion that took place on European soil: the invasion of Spanish territory by French troops in the autumn of 1808. This entry, that supposedly was just the crossing of the Napoleonic army on the way to Lisbon and that was contemplated in the Treaty of Fontainebleau formerly signed between Napoleon and the Spanish Crown, very soon became a full-fledged invasion of Spain. The final consequence was the crowning of Joseph I, older brother of Napoleon Bonaparte, as king of Spain and the Indies. In a matter of months, the Spanish Crown had passed from Charles IV to Ferdinand VII, then back to Charles IV, then to Napoleon and finally to his brother Joseph I. While the latter sat on the throne of the largest empire of the time, Ferdinand VII, the legitimate king of Spain, was kept by Napoleon in the French city of Bayonne where he would stay as a guest-prisoner of the French emperor until 1814.

Meanwhile, the news started to spread in America that their new king was Napoleon’s brother. During the whole emancipatory process of a territory as big and variegated as Spanish America, few things were unanimous, but this was one of them: Spanish Americans of all social and economic walks outright rejected the new monarch, whom they viewed as an heir to the sacrilegious French Revolution. Consequently, the table was set for what would be a protracted emancipatory, autonomic or independence process depending on the period under study and on the region in question. In any case, by the end of this process, the continental Spanish Empire



in America would be a creature of the past, replaced by several new sovereign countries. The diplomatic recognition and standing of these new nation-states, however, would vary from one country to another and in some instances would take a long time, depending, more than anything else, on the non-recognition of the Spanish Crown and on the pressures that Ferdinand VII exercised on some of the most important European governments.

The crumbling down of the Spanish Empire in America was detonated by an external event, but the quasi permanent situation of warfare in the Old Continent, at times in the American continent and almost permanently in the Caribbean (either open or undercover) had created a context that could, by the end of the first decade of the 19th century, find a detonator with relative ease. To this international situation should be added the social unrest in some parts of Spanish America and the tensions that existed in certain regions between *criollos* and peninsulars. Both these issues were directly linked to the Bourbon reforms; however, it is important to insist that none of them had created a revolutionary or even a pre-revolutionary situation in Spanish America. In fact, as several of the protagonists of the Spanish liberal revolution of 1808-1814 and of what eventually became the independences of Spanish America would explicitly recognize, if the political convulsion of 1808 provoked by the Napoleonic invasion of the Spanish Peninsula had not taken place, the Spanish Empire in America would still have had a long way ahead of it.

In any case, once the cards started to fall, there was no way of stopping them; this was due, among other reasons, to the fact that between 1808 and 1814 the Spanish troops were fighting against the best army of their time: Napoleon's. Since the first signs of social and political unrest manifested in the creation of some *juntas* in the "Alto Perú" in the year 1809, until the disintegration of what historians call "Gran Colombia" in 1830, turmoil, violence and political instability characterized almost all of the Spanish American territories. In ideological and constitutional terms, certain regions (such as Venezuela and New Granada) evinced the influence of some documents of the Revolution of the Thirteen Colonies. However, this influence was much less evident in other territories. In the case of New Spain and despite the geographic proximity, during the first years of the independence process, the political leaders of the Viceroyalty knew little about U.S. political institutions. If we can talk of "influence" coming from the north in the case of this viceroyalty, we would have to wait until the Mexican constitutional congress of 1823.

It is safe to maintain that all the Spanish American territories mixed Spanish political and constitutional thought with other elements, mainly French. However, it should be noted that for the Spaniards and Spanish Americans the enemy was Napoleon; therefore, French authors and French ideas often had to be disguised in one way or another. In this regard, it has been some time since the experts on the political and intellectual history of the *mundo hispánico* during this period have abandoned the false dichotomy "Suárez or Rousseau" (Suárez is the famous neo-scholastic Spanish philosopher). The reason is twofold: first, that the said dilemma never existed

in the minds of the vast majority of the political leaders and public intellectuals that wrote about and tried to explain what was going on in Spanish America during the first two decades of the 19th century, and, second, because intellectual history of the past few decades has shown that such dichotomies have no real sense. Ideas are not neat packages to be delivered in receptacles (be it a person, a group of politicians or an entire society) and their transmission always entails twists and distortions of every kind, dictated mostly by the pressing political needs of the moment and the practical dilemmas that have to be solved one way or another at various historical junctures.

The first political dilemma in the case of the *revoluciones hispánicas* had to do with the absence of the legitimate king, Ferdinand VII. His sovereignty had to be kept in deposit until he was able to regain his throne. However, many possibilities appeared on the horizon: a single person (preferably closely related to the deposed king), a sort of privy council, a gathering of representatives of certain cities, a gathering of representatives from many territories, etc. However, in what capacity would these “deputies” represent the inhabitants of the cities or territories in question? This and many other questions had to be solved as soon as possible if the Spanish patriots wanted to avoid the literal disappearance of the Spanish government while the king was in France. The same can be said of the Spanish Americans once they decided not to accept the kind of representation that the metropole tried to impose on them (firstly a series of *juntas* that claimed ascendancy in Spanish America, then a Regency and finally the Cadiz Cortes). Representation was the crux of the revolutions in the *mundo hispánico*, but the same can be said of the other Atlantic Revolutions. Referring to the independence movement in the Thirteen Colonies, Gordon S. Wood writes: “Of all the conceptions of political theory underlying the momentous developments of the American revolutionary era, none was more important than that of representation.” (*Representation* 1). The fact that the expression “No taxation without representation” has become the historical motto of the emancipatory process of the Thirteen Colonies is revealing regarding its political and historical relevance. Coming back to the *revoluciones hispánicas*, there was an issue that ended up preceding all others: if the Peninsular or Spanish American inhabitants had the prerogative to elect a representative, it was because they embodied what would become one of the protagonists and at the same time one of the most elusive entities of the political modernity during the Age of Revolution: the nation.

The apparent solution given to this issue in the case of the *mundo hispánico* and more specifically of the effort by the Spanish liberals to maintain the unity of Peninsular Spain and Spanish America was the first article of the Cadiz Constitution or the Constitution of 1812: “The Spanish Nation is the reunion of all Spaniards of both hemispheres.” It was in that Spanish port where around 200 delegates from the Peninsula and some 60 from Spanish American territories gathered from 1810 to 1812 to draft the first Constitution in the modern history of Spain and of Spanish America. This long document (384 articles) was the result, more than anything else, of

the effort, political ability and political foresight of a group of men who identified themselves as *liberales*. This was the first time in history that a group of politicians called themselves so. From here, the term would rapidly expand to other parts of Europe and then to the rest of the world.

Of course, this first instance of Spanish liberalism had limits and ambiguities (as any other historic liberalism), but the political, social and cultural transformation that the Cadiz Constitution implied for Spain and its American empire *vis-à-vis* the Old Regime was of gigantic proportions (Mirow). “By abolishing many of the institutions of the old regime —press censorship, the Inquisition, privileges of the nobility, feudal dues, the *fueros*, Indian tribute, draft labor— these constitution makers uttered a cry of ultraliberalism that reverberated throughout Spanish America for more than a decade.” (Graham 69). It should be added, however, that article 12 of the Cadiz Constitution explicitly rejected the exercise of any other religion than Catholicism; besides, the *fueros* of the clergy and the military were maintained. More importantly for Spanish Americans is the fact that the Constitution did not grant them several of their main requests regarding political and commercial autonomy. These denials on the part of the peninsular deputies at the Cortes of Cadiz are essential to explain the opposition that the document met in several territories in America and to understand why many Spanish Americans did not see the 1812 Constitution as a solution to the political crisis that revolutionized the whole of the *mundo hispánico* from 1808 onwards (Breña, *El primer liberalismo*).

However, the effort made by the Spanish and Spanish American *liberales* and the radical transformation that this effort entailed in many aspects, including national sovereignty, individual rights and unprecedented institutional arrangements (division of powers, electoral system, modern political representation, etc.) would be a fruitless one: in 1814 Ferdinand VII returned to the throne of Spain, dissolved the Cadiz Cortes and reinstated absolutism. National sovereignty, individual liberties, division of powers, elections and the liberal government that the Cadiz Constitution had guaranteed were overthrown from one day to the next. It is true that liberals and liberalism would be back again in power in Spain between 1820 and 1823. However, once again, this time with support from the French army of the Holy Alliance, Ferdinand VII would be reinstated in the Spanish throne and absolutism would come to an end in Spain until his death in 1833.

But what about the emancipation movements in Spanish America? The Cadiz Constitution, promulgated in March 1812, was followed in some territories in America (among them, the two most important viceroyalties: New Spain and Peru), but several others refused to follow it. In every case, however, the influence of the metropolitan political events and ideas on the Spanish American emancipation or independence movements is undeniable (Breña 2016). By 1812, the emancipation processes had gone a long way in regions like Venezuela and New Granada, and others were either very near to declaring independence (Paraguay) or had advanced a lot in their sense of being capable of taking care of themselves in political terms (the best example is

the port of Buenos Aires). As mentioned, each territory in Spanish America followed particular political *tempos* once the *crisis hispánica* started. The reactions depended on variables of very different nature, starting with the geographic “closeness” or distance of each territory from the metropole. Other important factors were the racial characteristics of each society (no wonder that the two most populated by the indigenous populations, i.e., New Spain and Peru, were the most reluctant to accept any profound political or social change), the relationship between the capital of each territory and its neighboring cities (Montevideo regarding Buenos Aires, for example) or the rapport between certain regions with the capital city (Paraguay *vis-à-vis* Buenos Aires or Lima).

In the case of Central America, an author that has devoted many years to analyze its transition from the colonial period to the independent era, concludes that the region experienced “an independence of paradoxes” (Dym 2006, xviii): with a very important indigenous population, there was no indigenous revolt; the region was not in favor of independence, nor was it royalist; it participated enthusiastically in the two experiments of constitutional monarchy coming from the metropole (1812-1814 and 1820-1821), but it then established a federal republic with the same enthusiasm. Finally, with very little external interference during the independence period and with the advantage of not having suffered a major turmoil or internal strife, the Kingdom of Guatemala became the Central American Federation. This experiment not only was short-lived (1824-1839), but it went through the same political instability that characterized the rest of Latin America and finally disintegrated into five new countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua y Costa Rica). The only exception to the aforementioned instability during the first decades of the 19th century was Paraguay. This was mainly due to the decision of its founding father and dictator, Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, to isolate the country from the rest of the world. To sum up the last two paragraphs, Spanish American independence movements were a series of peculiar and distinct political processes. Nevertheless, the outcomes proved to be rather similar. As it will be addressed in the remainder of this essay, the international context, in its financial, economic and commercial aspects, would play a role of utmost importance in this respect.

As with any other revolutionary process, the other element that cannot be ignored when trying to explain what happened in Spanish America during the Age of Revolution was the role that powerful individuals played. The first name that comes to mind is of course Simón Bolívar, but José de San Martín, Miguel Hidalgo, Bernardo O’Higgins, Bernardo de Monteagudo, Antonio José de Sucre, José Artigas, José María Morelos, Mariano Moreno or Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia also played key roles at certain moments and to a great extent determined the course and result of events at certain junctures. However, none of them were able to give any of the new countries the political stability necessary for a political, economic or social “take-off”.

In this respect, the contrast with the “Founding Fathers” of the United States is striking. As is well known, at least the first four presidents of the United States were Founding Fathers of

the first order (Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison). This fact, by itself, says a lot about the continuity and stability that these men, along with many others, were able to create between the revolutionary period and the first decades of independent life. What happened in Spanish America was radically different (Breña, *El imperio de las circunstancias*). However, it should not be forgotten that by the time the Thirteen Colonies started their war against England, they already had an experience of around a century and a half concerning representative institutions. That was not the case with the Spanish Empire in America. It is true that certain representative institutions existed (in the traditional sense of the word), but they did not resemble the ones that had worked for a rather long in British America. This lack of “modern” political experience would prove crucial once the Spanish American nations started their trajectories as republics, a system of government that presupposes a series of values, attitudes, and practices that Spanish Americans had to improvise. It is also crucial to note that the leadership of the Founding Fathers of the United States was a feat of political ability, but as Gordon S. Wood asserts, the democratic world of progress and equality among individuals that they contributed to create gave birth to a society in which extraordinary individuals like them would not have much space to develop. In fact, by the time de Tocqueville arrived in the United States (in 1831), men like them had almost completely disappeared from the political scene (Wood 2006).

Another element that cannot be ignored in this regard is that the protracted wars of the Spanish Americans among themselves and against the royalist troops created a military caste that, once the wars were over, would not stand still. In fact, this caste decided to play a political role that would have nefarious consequences for the political development of the region. As an example, the first civil president of Peru took office in 1872, that is, half a century after the independence of the country. Once again, the contrast with the United States could not be starker; in the words of the author of one of the very few hemispheric histories of the Americas, “The independence wars were, in short, the making of the United States and the ruin of much of the rest of the Americas” (Fernández-Armesto 126).

There is one more factor that cannot be ignored when trying to explain the enormous difficulties that besieged the Spanish American countries after independence: the international economic situation and, more specifically, the commercial conditions under which they were born. “The economies of the Spanish colonies were ruined by the wars, which had caused long and total cessations of foreign trade, whereas the states of the northern Union, enjoying the benefits of protection from the French and Spanish navies, actually gained new trading partners and multiplied their shipping in the course of the war” (Fernández-Armesto 122-3).

Besides, at the time of independence British bankers were the only ones capable of giving the new countries the liquidity they required to get their economies going. The interest rates that some of these bankers imposed to Spanish American governments were so onerous that soon



they were unable to pay back. The long-term consequences of the British bankers' decision not to lend more money to any Spanish American government fall into the domain of counterfactual history, but it would hardly be exaggeration to say that this was one of the main reasons behind it was these young governments' lack of political stability. To a certain extent, international commerce was doomed and therefore the land became the main the source of wealth, power and social prestige. In other words, the years that should have meant the political and economic take-off of several Spanish American countries were, in several respects, the worst of times for many of them (Démelas and Saint-Geours).

The issues mentioned above have to do with some of the outcomes of the revolutionary processes that occurred in Spanish America during the second and third decades of the 19th century. The variety of these movements and the differences among them have already been stressed, but it is important to add that, with the exception of the Viceroyalty of the River Plate (where the Spanish Crown was never able to send troops during the whole revolutionary period), in the rest of Spanish America the outcome was indecisive for many years. In fact, at around 1815, it seemed as if the Spanish king would be able to regain the majority of his continental territories in America. However, from 1816 onwards, the tide turned around again in the northern part of South America. The main responsible factor for this "reversal of fortune" for the Spanish Crown was in fact a single individual: Simón Bolívar. Only three years later, he founded Colombia (or "Gran Colombia" as historians call it), the most important but not the most ambitious of his political projects (which was the creation of a Pan-American political and diplomatic entity, symbolized by the Congress of Panama in 1826. This project ended up in complete failure).

Bolívar is more well-known and sometimes exclusively known as a military figure and a politician. However, as already mentioned, he was also a man of intellect. Nobody else in the whole of Spanish America was able to analyze with such shrewdness the *enjeux* that were behind and present during the wars of independence against the mother country. The brief document known as the "Letter of Jamaica", written in 1815, is no doubt the most famous of his texts, but his intellectual perspicuity and political acumen are evident in many other documents as well (Bolívar 2008). He was well versed in the classics and in ancient history, and he had also read Machiavelli and several authors of the European Enlightenment. In any case, his value and importance as a thinker is evident in the light he shed upon the political, social, and cultural ambiguities of the Age of Revolution in Spanish America, identifying what was at stake for Spanish Americans.

In the northern part of Spanish America, that is, in the Viceroyalty of New Spain, that was by far the most populated and richest of all the Spanish American territories, things took place in a very different way (Breña, "The Emancipation Process"). In fact, as Richard Graham has noted, the beginning of the emancipation movement in New Spain "was more akin to the 1780 rebellion of Tupac Amaru in Peru than to the other struggles for independence in Spanish America" (Graham



94). The insurrection started by the priest Miguel Hidalgo on September 16th, 1810, turned out to be a popular movement with no parallels with what happened only a few months before in South America: first in Caracas (April), then in Buenos Aires (May), then in Bogotá (July) and only a couple of days after the start of Hidalgo's movement in Santiago de Chile. In all of these cities, the movements were led by creole elites. That, however, was not the case in New Spain. Not because Hidalgo and the other leaders of the insurrection (Allende, Aldama, Abasolo and Jiménez) were not creoles, for all of them in fact were. The reason was that matters quickly got out of control and, in a matter of days, Hidalgo was heading an "army" of thousands of indigenous people, mestizos, peasants, and laborers of all kinds and social strata. During four months, Hidalgo "revolutionized" the Viceroyalty, but more from a social than a political perspective. In fact, his political objectives were not clear and historians still discuss if he was fighting for independence (Herrejón) or for other motives (Olveda). What was clear was his intention to keep Catholicism intact, his unbreakable decision to fight against the French and their influence in New Spain, as well as his plan to put an end to a series of taxes, duties and levies that, in his view, were bleeding New Spaniards for the sole benefit of the Spanish Crown, the Spanish authorities of the Viceroyalty and the peninsulars that lived in it.

Hidalgo was finally defeated in January 1811, captured in March and executed in July of that same year. Following that, another priest, José María Morelos continued the fight during four more years, until he too was captured and executed in December 1815. From that moment on, the Viceroyalty entered into a relative calm in comparison with what went on between 1810 and 1815. However, the insurgents were never wholly defeated and were able to be more than a nuisance for the Spanish authorities in some parts of the Viceroyalty. The end of the emancipation process in New Spain did not come until 1821 in a paradoxical way: Agustín de Iturbide, a royalist lieutenant that had quite successfully fought against the insurgents during ten years (1810-1820) learned about the political changes that were taking place in Spain (i.e., the return of the liberals to power) and decided that New Spain had to stop depending on the political vicissitudes of the metropole, much more so if the liberals were once again at the helm of the Spanish monarchy.

After secret meetings with several political leaders, some members of the Catholic establishment and the most important insurgent leader still fighting against the royalists (Vicente Guerrero), Iturbide was able to materialize the independence of New Spain in September 1821 in a relatively non-violent way; Mexico was thus born. Iturbide's social standing (a wealthy *criollo*), his career (a military man), his political views (mainly conservative) and his lack of concern regarding the vast majority of the inhabitants of New Spain put the consummation of the emancipation process of New Spain in evident contrast with the movement that Hidalgo had begun eleven years before and that Morelos continued. It also was a peculiar process when compared with some of the movements that took place in South America, not only because in none of them

did priests play the steering role that Hidalgo and Morelos played in New Spain (this aspect helps explain their enormous magnetism with the popular classes, as well as the connotation of religious war the movement had since the beginning), but also because in some of those territories independence had to be fought violently almost until the very end. In any case, by the end of 1821, the only territory in the American continent where the Spanish Crown still had a degree of control was part of the Viceroyalty of Peru. It is true that the Spanish troops were able to regain control of Lima after José de San Martín's declaration of independence in 1821. However, three years later, under the command of Sucre, the troops of Bolívar defeated the Spanish army in the famous battle of Ayacucho, already mentioned. The new country was then officially called Republic of Peru. The continental Spanish possessions in America did not exist anymore (with the exception of some ports that were very difficult to be taken by Spanish American armies that lacked what could be properly called a navy).

As a reaction to a neglect of almost two centuries, for some years there has been a tendency in Western historiography to study the Brazilian emancipatory process as part of the Spanish American revolutionary movements. It is true that in territories like the border region between Brazil and the Viceroyalty of the River Plate, there is no way to study its history during the independence period without considering the Portuguese Empire as a central actor, and it is also true that the study of the Brazilian emancipation period without references to Spanish America has important disadvantages (Pimenta, *Brasil y las independencias de Hispanoamérica*). Nonetheless, the inclusion of the Brazilian case within the Spanish American independence movements is still an open question. The main reason is that, despite certain similarities, there are a number of significant differences too. In the words of Jeremy Adelman, "When Brazil seceded from Portugal, the process was less contested; the incision between revolution and counterrevolution was much less bloody —indeed difficult to locate at all." (*Sovereignty and Revolution* 309). In fact, as the section that Mark A. Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson devote to the aftermath of independence in their book on colonial Latin America clearly demonstrates, significant contrasts between Spanish America and Brazil persisted after independence in political, social and economic terms (Burkholder and Johnson 343-53). These contrasts stem from a starting point that was dramatically different: "Brazil, having served as the capital of the Portuguese Empire from 1808 to 1821 and then gaining independence under the leadership of the prince-regent in 1822, avoided most of the economic and social dislocations that proved so costly to its neighbors" (Burkholder and Johnson 344). A separate treatment has therefore several arguments in its favor; this is the option taken here.

Before making reference to the Spanish and Ibero-American crisis of 1808 that the Napoleonic invasion provoked in the whole "mundo hispánico", it is important to mention that the contrasts between the Portuguese Empire and the Spanish Empire in America go back to

the colonial period. An expert in this field, Bartolomé Bennassar, identifies four main differences: 1) Brazil evinced a very slow process of peopling; 2) demographically speaking, the indigenous population was relatively small and from the 17th century onwards the black population became by far the most considerable; 3) the economic evolution of Brazil followed a series of clearly differentiated cycles (wood, sugar, gold and plantations) and, finally, 4) the political structure was more fragile and less effective than its Spanish American counterparts (269-71). If we add the omnipresence and the crucial role that slavery played in Brazilian society and economy throughout the 18th century, we have a scenario that could be considered remarkably different from the Spanish American one.

There is a single historic fact that by itself could justify a separate treatment of the Brazilian emancipatory process: in 1808, just before the Napoleonic troops arrived in Lisbon to take possession of the city, the prince-regent João VI, the whole royal family and the court were able to escape by sea, protected by the British navy, and moved the capital of the Portuguese Empire from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro. João would become king in 1816, while he was still in Brazil, and would stay there until 1822. This means that in the case of the Portuguese Empire, during fourteen crucial years, the Age of Revolution was viewed mainly from America, not from the metropole. During this difficult period for the whole Atlantic world, the Portuguese Crown was able to maintain a legitimate government in Brazil thanks to the presence of the king in its territory (compare this with Ferdinand VII's captivity in Bayonne). This also meant that the whole Portuguese Empire in America remained united throughout the whole Spanish American independence process. During all those years, there was no intention on the part of Brazilians to become independent. In fact, the word "independence" should have sounded odd to many of them considering that their king was in American soil throughout all those years. Moreover, when João became king in 1816, his title was king of Portugal, Brazil and the Algarve; that is, right in the middle of the independence wars of Spanish America, the Brazilian ex-colony acquired a political status that Brazilians had never dreamed of. In 1822, the revolutionary situation in Portugal forced João VI to return to the metropole. This was the event that precipitated Brazilian independence. The king's eldest son, Pedro, decided to stay in Brazil and very soon realized that considering the political situation in Portugal (with the liberals trying to restore metropolitan power in the ex-colony), independence was the only option to avoid a violent rupture. He thus declared independence in September 1822; three months later, he became Pedro I, Emperor of Brazil. As Stefan Rinke has remarked, the origin of the new Brazilian monarchy could be interpreted as a reaction to the liberal revolution that was taking place in Portugal. (319)

When independence came, it was not because Brazilians wanted it, although certain groups feared that the departure of King João could create political unrest while the possibility of independence was not discarded by some. However, if independence came about in 1822, it was

mainly due to the political situation in Portugal, the return of the court to Lisbon and the decisions taken in the metropole towards Brazil. When Pedro realized that the Brazilian elites would never go back to the previous situation, he opted for independence. “Once decided upon, Brazilian independence was relatively quick and peacefully established, in contrast to Spanish America where the struggle for independence was for the most part long drawn out and violent” (Bethell 195).

The situation outlined above and the fact that the master-mind behind the independence process was the well-known conservative politician José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva, explain the following conclusion by the same author: “The transition from colony to independent empire was characterized by an extraordinary degree of political, economic and social continuity.” (ibid. 196). In fact and as could be expected, the shift that Brazilian historiography has gone through in the last decades from political to social and cultural history has had as one of its consequences the reinforcement of the so-called continuity thesis (Schwartz). The same can be said regarding not only contemporary Latin American historiography on the period (Adelman, “Independence in Latin America”), but also considering the entire independent history of the region (Van Young).

When we turn to the social conditions in Brazil, the foremost aspect is slavery. The institution was not only maintained after independence but it continued to exist until 1888. The number of slaves in Brazil at the beginning of the 19th century may vary a lot, but they were no less than a million and a half. Slavery not only persisted after Brazil obtained its independence in 1822, but kept increasing steadily until 1850 when, as noticed, it reached a figure close to three million slaves (even if Pedro I ordered the abolition of the slave trade in 1831). By itself, the continuation of slavery meant the persistence of the traditional corporate society of colonial times. Another aspect that contributed to this persistence was an aspect already mentioned: the Brazilian process was much less violent (with very few exceptions) than its equivalents in Spanish America. One of the most important consequences of this aspect of Brazilian independence was that the military did not play the political role they played in Spanish America for decades (if not centuries). The relative political stability of the Brazilian Empire has here one of its main causes. The other two aspects that contributed to the continuities that can be identified between colonial Brazil and independent Brazil have to do with low literacy rates and the scarcity of what could be considered a Brazilian “public opinion” (there was not a single printing press in Brazil before 1808 and not one university). It is true that the printing press arrived with the king in 1808 and, of course, this changed the situation radically in terms of the documents that were published, discussed and disseminated; however, the contrast in both aspects with Spanish America is, once again, noteworthy (just to give an idea: only in the Viceroyalty of New Spain there were at least ten printing presses at the beginning of the 19th century).

The physical presence of João VI in Brazil and the fact that he was able to reach agreements

with the vast majority of Brazilian creole landowners created a situation that contrasts with the instability that characterized almost all of the Spanish American territories from 1810 onwards. In Brazil, the old colonial structures were kept in place after independence and economic development was guaranteed by a slave force that, as mentioned, kept increasing until the middle of the 19th century. As mentioned, this factor is essential to explain the relative social stability that characterizes Brazil when compared with the unrest that defined Spanish American societies during their first decades of independent life. However, there were a couple of revolutionary or republican movements in Brazil even before independence, more specifically in 1789 and 1798. The most important one that took place once the monarchy was installed in Rio de Janeiro occurred in Pernambuco in 1817; however, as with the previous uprisings, it failed without putting the monarchy in real trouble. In fact, extreme liberalism and republicanism were defeated again and again in Brazil between 1821 and 1823 and, finally, in 1824, when Pedro I issued his own constitution (and not the one a constituent congress had drafted). One of the lessons that can be learned from the repeated victories of the conservatives during this period of Brazilian history, and as Pedro himself was to learn very soon, is that in Brazil it was impossible to go against the creole planters who constituted the landowning class. When he abdicated in 1831, Pedro I left his five-year old son Pedro as the Emperor of Brazil. From that moment on, the history of Brazil was thoroughly Brazilian, in the sense that Pedro I was a Portuguese king who during his reign mostly had Portuguese as military officials, advisors and bureaucrats. In any case, the tutor of Pedro II was none other than De Andrada e Silva. Pedro II was to become emperor in 1840, enjoying a long rule until 1889, when Brazil became a republic.

The fact that a territory as immense as Brazil remained intact during the Age of Revolution is a remarkable fact regarding the legitimacy of the Brazilian monarchy and the control that landowners were able to exert in general during the transition from colonial times to independence and its aftermath. This control, barbarous on a daily basis and brutal when it was challenged, was essential not only to keep the Brazilian economy working, but, more than that, it ensured the continuity of Brazilian colonial society and the stability of Brazilian politics when compared with Spanish America. These elements considered altogether help explain why Brazil reached the middle of the 19th century with a standing or prestige that Spanish American countries could not rival. In the words of the Argentinian historian Tulio Halperin Donghi and without ignoring the aforementioned omnipresence of slavery, by that time Brazil was “the most successful political example” in Ibero-America. (Halperin Donghi 334)

### III. Independences and revolutions in the Americas during the Age of Revolution: the limits of causation, connectivity, and convergence

The complexity of the history of the Age of Revolution in the Americas has only been glimpsed at in the preceding pages. The origins, motives, development, *dénouements*, and consequences of the independence of the Thirteen Colonies, the revolution of Saint Domingue, the emancipation processes in the several territories that constituted the Spanish Empire in America and, finally, the Brazilian transition from colony to empire, were contrasting in so many aspects that it makes difficult at times to find evidence or overarching criteria to explain all of them, notwithstanding the historic commonalities that stem from the long-standing commercial and military rivalries of European empires, the Enlightenment progeny of certain ideas and the sharing of very general political principles. Depending on the field of expertise and the perspective each historian adopts, the word “revolution” may seem questionable when applied to all of them. As Crane Brinton wrote almost eighty years ago in the first sentence of his classic book *The Anatomy of Revolution*: “Revolution is one of the looser words.” (3)

More recently, but still a long way from the present, Hannah Arendt analyzed the meaning of the word “revolution” in the first chapter of her book *On Revolution*. She made her analysis based on two processes: that of the Thirteen Colonies and the French Revolution. As illuminating as her analysis is in several aspects, it is Arendt herself who puts us on guard regarding a definition of “revolution” that could satisfactorily encompass even the two cases that she studies. For example, what she calls “the social question” was a central aspect of the French Revolution, but, in her words, “played hardly any role in the course of the American Revolution” (Arendt 17). Following Arendt’s analysis, the Spanish American revolutions did not share with their predecessors several of the elements that characterize the term “revolution” (in its modern sense of course): the sense that something completely new was beginning, the sense of a new origin, the *pathos* of novelty, the awareness that a completely different form of government is being created and, finally, the feeling that the actors have of inaugurating a new era for humankind. Partly for chronological reasons, all these elements could not be present in the Spanish American independence movements (that took place *after* the two revolutions studied by Arendt); at least, not with the connotations that these elements had in the American and French revolutions. Regarding the three movements studied by Lester D. Langley in his book *The Americas in the Age of Revolution* (the revolution of the Thirteen Colonies, the Haitian Revolution, and the Spanish American Revolutions), his conclusion is unequivocal: “None of the three revolutions I have surveyed conforms sufficiently to any of the prevailing theories of revolution identified in history or in the social sciences so as to explain why they occurred or followed a particular course.” (285)

If any effort to define the concept of “revolution” is doomed to fail, it still is not an idle



exercise to try to identify some aspects of the political, military, and social upheavals that took place in the Americas during the Age of Revolution that help explain in what sense they can be considered “revolutionary”. All these movements had as their first and most evident consequence the acquisition of political independence. The United States, Haiti and eight new countries in Ibero-America saw the light between 1783 and 1826. This independence was revolutionary in itself, no doubt, but it was eminently political in character. As Arendt pointed out regarding the American Revolution and as many Latin American historians have remarked regarding the political independence of Paraguay, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Bolivia, Central America and Mexico (if we consider 1826 as the closing date), this political revolution did not have a social equivalent. In the case of the United States, the persistence of slavery is the most flagrant example of the social conservatism that, somewhat paradoxically and with different emphases, characterized the Age of Revolution in the Americas. In the case of Spanish America, independence implied the abolition of slavery in only two countries (Chile and Mexico), those with the lowest percentage of slaves. In the rest of Spanish America, slavery continued to exist until the middle of the century. In the United States, it would cost the country one of the bloodiest wars of the 19th century and the murder of one of its presidents (Abraham Lincoln) to abolish it in 1865. No need to add here much more about the Brazilian Empire in this regard, for it has already been mentioned that slavery was abolished there until 1888.

The political revolution that transformed the Americas during the Age of Revolution turned around a series of principles that almost all the revolutionary movements shared: individual rights and liberties, national sovereignty, division of powers, elections, and constitutionalism (to name the most important). However, it is not only the oft-repeated and ahistorical notion that many social groups were excluded from these principles that comes to mind (if the period 1775-1825 is the chronological axis of this essay, it could not have been otherwise), but also the much more interesting idea that these principles had different connotations and emphases depending on the political needs and social configuration of each society. These are inevitable when we consider the ever-changing contexts of debate, that may vary even within the same revolutionary process. For this reason, the discourse of influences, that was so common until fairly recently, is gradually disappearing from the vocabulary of intellectual historians.

Some political ideas may seem eternal and some political terms may not vary too much across decades, but historians nowadays are much more careful regarding the purported influence of one author on another, or of one revolution on the next, and even more careful when an author or a book or a series of ideas supposedly influenced certain political events or political practices. Establishing connections among revolutions is more challenging than what some authors who inscribe themselves within Atlantic or Global History purport. Connections are evident and traceable in certain social, economic and cultural domains, but once we get into a revolutionary process it

is very important to give proper weight to the specific circumstances that led to the revolutionary moment and to be skeptic when direct lines are established between different revolutions. Not only because the immediate circumstances and the socio-political contexts are often decisive in heuristic terms, but also because the purported ideological influences tend to respond to a way of looking at intellectual history that tends to simplify authors, books and ideas, as well as the peculiarities of the specific revolutionary process under study.

The American Revolution has often been viewed as an example that was followed by some French revolutionaries and its chronological proximity and political daring attracted some others. Of course the Haitian Revolution is unthinkable without the French Revolution, but, as this essay has tried to show, the former was not an independence movement in a proper sense and, besides, the influence of the French revolutionary process over it is quite ambiguous at times, when not in open contradiction with some of the principles of the Revolution of 1789. On the connections between the Haitian Revolution and the Spanish American independence movements and for reasons that are evident from a social perspective, almost all of the Spanish American revolutionaries considered the Haitian insurrection as an evil that had to be avoided at all costs. In this regard, the social revolution that took place in Saint Domingue played a role similar to the one the Tupac Amaru rebellion of 1780-81 seems to have had for the creole Peruvian elites: it reinforced their conservatism. Regarding this issue, it should also be added that historians of the Spanish American independence movements tend to agree that if there was a social group that not only did not get palpable advantages, but came out of these processes in worse shape, it was the indigenous population. A similar conclusion can be made about the North American natives: "Whoever won the American Revolution, historians agree that native American nations were the biggest losers." (Bernstein 23)

At one point or another, the debate about the independence processes in Spanish America inevitably falls into the never-ending debate over the revolutions that failed: "There has been, to be sure, a strong sense among many that independence was a failed moment in which nations struggled but failed to cohere, and more recently in which political liberties never had the leveling social effects that many, especially more radical, historians inscribed into the very meaning of the term 'revolution'." (Adelman, "Independence in Latin America" 175-6). From the vantage point of the 21st century, this line of reasoning seems unassailable. Beyond doubt, some of the most unequal countries in the world are in Latin America. Furthermore, it is even more striking that countries with economies as big as that of Brazil or Mexico are even more unequal than the rest. In fact, they are two of the emergent countries with some of the highest social inequalities in the world. Regarding Haiti, its glaring poverty and inequalities are well-known.

That the Age of Revolution in the Americas was revolutionary in many respects is undeniable. But when continuities seem to have been so many and so intense, it is no wonder

that historians still debate about its revolutionary or non-revolutionary character. This is further due to the social continuity that the North and South American cases evince as well as the fact that the revolutions of the 20th century have given the term “revolution” a much stronger connotation. The question here for all the independence movements that took place in the Americas during the “Age of Revolution” was posed several years ago by Eric Van Young: “Was there an Age of Revolution in Spanish America?” (Van Young). Strange as it may sound for an essay titled “Independence movements in the Americas during the Age of Revolution”, one of the conclusions that can be arrived at after a cursory review of these movements is that in several respects they were less revolutionary than what is still assumed by some historians and by a large part of the general public. However, this “conclusion” should not ignore that in aspects as important as political legitimacy, political culture, and political obligation, independence meant a radical transformation. A transformation that was evident in certain institutions, beliefs and attitudes that were unknown for the societies of the *ancien régime*. Needless to add, many political, economic, and social practices took a lot of time to go from constitutions and secondary laws to the “real” world of everyday life.

Transfers and entanglements of different kinds took place throughout the Americas during the Age of Revolution; however, geographic expanse, limitations in transportation, and linguistic barriers should put us on guard when trying to give these transfers and entanglements an intensity that they could not have had. The historiography of the last decades in Western academia has shown us that the levels of hemispheric communication were much higher than what we used to think in the past. Nonetheless, the limitations and barriers were also considerable, often unsurmountable, for the vast majority of the inhabitants of the Americas of the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. The result is an “Age of Revolution” that gains in its Atlantic and global dimension, no doubt, but that at the same time ends up diluting the singularities of each process under study and that establishes an interconnectedness that should not be accepted uncritically.

Without some level of generalization, historiography is an impossibility. Nonetheless, it may also be argued that revolutionary periods and the exceptional political situations they generate are particularly resilient to the kind of generalizations that constitute the substance and precondition of certain historiographic approaches that have a lot of academic resonance nowadays. Once again, it should be stressed that some of the most important developments that intellectual history has witnessed in the last decades are skeptical regarding some of the sequential hypothesis, assumptions and causalities that some of these approaches establish or suggest.

In his hemispheric history called *The Americas*, Felipe Fernández-Armesto states that the revolutions that have been reviewed in this essay can be seen as the last great common American experience and that the chaotic politics that characterized Latin America for many decades was

the product, in particular, of the circumstances in which independence was won (117 and 127). As this essay has tried to show, the commonality in question is open to debate. Besides, Fernández-Armesto argues that from that historical moment on, divergence became one of the essential factors to explain the history of the hemisphere. At the very end of his book, he talks about the possibility of a re-convergence of the continent based on a proper handling of the environmental challenge. At present, this possibility seems far-fetched, among other reasons due to one aspect that can indeed be considered a commonality among the four revolutionary processes considered here: the lack of profound socio-economic leveling effects that these processes had on their respective societies (with differences of course, but in general the argument stands).

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