DEBATES

Loyalists, Race, and Disunity during the Spanish American Wars of Independence A Grumpy Reading

by Jorge I. Domínguez | Harvard University | jorge_dominguez@harvard.edu

Simón Bolívar may have gained unusual insight into Jean-Jacques Rousseau's expression that human beings must sometimes be "forced to be free," as he pondered why the Viceroy in Lima was so successful at first preventing, and later delaying, the independence of all of Spanish South America. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, Peruvian Creoles seemed to have found a new mission as the militant center of royalist loyalty in South America.[1]

At least half of the troops sent from Lima to reconquer Chile under General Mariano Osorio in 1818 were Peruvian-born. Peruvians, including free blacks in the army, who had subdued revolts in the early years of the South American wars. Even as Peruvian independence approached, most of the fighting on behalf of the independence of Peru was done by non-Peruvians. Peruvians accounted for only 42 percent of the fighting forces, and 48 percent of the casualties, on the independence side at the battle of Junín in August 1824; the rest were from countries to the north and south. To the very end, Peruvian recruits were insufficient to replenish the losses of the independence armies.

A similar picture of Bourbon loyalty is found among Peruvian elites. Of the fourteen Peruvian Members of Congress who remained in Lima during the brief Spanish reoccupation in 1823, eight switched to become royalists. Peru's first president, José de la Riva Agüero, would soon thereafter propose to the Viceroy that Peru should become a monarchy under a Spanish Prince selected by the Spanish King and, until then, the Viceroy should continue to rule. A year later, Peru's second head of government defected to the Spanish side during the second Spanish reconquest of Lima.

As Spanish America in 2010 takes note of the moment that came to be known as its independence two hundred years earlier, it is important to remember that the wars that tore apart Spain's American empire are best understood as simultaneous and interconnected civil and international wars. In choosing to study the process of Spanish American independence, it has been too easy to forget the loyalists ready to fight on behalf of the Crown, not just in Peru but in many other Spanish-American colonies as well. Indeed, if loyalty had not been such a widespread and powerful phenomenon, the wars of independence would not have been such a large-scale event. In the viceroyalty of New Spain and the Captaincy-General of Caracas—honored in patriotic histories for their struggles for independence—many loyalists successfully held independence back without needing to import many Spanish troops.[2]

Loyalists were a part of the shared experience of North and South America during the respective wars of independence. From Lima, Peru, to Lexington, Massachusetts, the European empires had many supporters. In Spanish America, the loyalists won the first rounds of the wars of independence, except in the Viceroyalty of Buenos Aires, though they would eventually be defeated almost everywhere. In North America, many loyalists fled to rump British North America—Canada. From South America and New Spain, many fled to Cuba and Puerto Rico and helped to ensure that these would remain Spanish colonies for nearly a full additional century, even after the majority of their people may have come to prefer independence. Cuban Creoles, however, needed little Spanish help to defend their link to Spain and defeat feeble pro-independence efforts in Cuba.

The racial order of the Spanish empire also broke down during the second decade of the nineteenth century and the interaction between the breakdowns of the political and racial orders proved explosive. On July 13, 1811, the patriot Supreme Junta of Caracas called upon citizens to defend the new independent republic, but it insisted upon going into battle with a racially segregated army. Articles VII and XVI of the Junta's decree asked citizens to gather "in Trinidad Plaza… The whites would enlist before the Church; the blacks to the east, and the mulattoes to the south… The slaves would remain at home at their masters' command, without leaving them except under government orders."[3] Militia battalions of whites and blacks would remain segregated, except that the top two officers of the black battalions would be white. Racial salary differentials persisted.

Compare that to the response of the royalist leadership in the city of Valencia. Valencia rose against Caracas and pledged loyalty to the king. The royalist forces in Valencia abolished slavery and proclaimed the civil equality of all citizens. When the patriot republican armies of General Francisco de Miranda attacked Valencia, that city's black militiamen were among its main defenders.

The counter-independence strategy of Crown officials fighting Caracas pro-independence Creoles built upon this racial divide. Royalist officials mobilized Afro-Venezuelans to fight Creole Caracas independence. As Bolívar put it unsympathetically, "a revolution of blacks, free and slave, broke out in the eastern coastal valleys, provoked, supplied and supported by agents of [Spanish General] Monteverde. These inhuman and vile people, feeding upon the blood and property of the patriots… committed the most horrible assassinations, thefts, assaults, and devastation."[4] Alas, royalist officer José Tomás Boves came to lead thousands of troops, of whom fewer than two hundred were Spaniards, while most were Afro-Venezuelans. The war's racial character deepened. In July 1814, Bolívar's armies were defeated, the republic collapsed, and the army of Boves entered Caracas, proclaiming the restoration of the empire. As Bolívar put it, still without much understanding of what had occurred: "Your brothers, not the Spaniards, have torn the country apart."[5]

The motivations for loyalty varied a great deal, of course, across the expanse of a Spanish America that ranged from Río Negro to the central prairies of North America. Viceregalist *Limeños* as well as the black plainsmen who followed Boves in their triumphant war against Bolívar and Caracas Creoles responded to different circumstances, constraints, and opportunities. The key point is, precisely, the enormous variety of reasons why a great many people in Spanish America across the economic hierarchies and the color spectrum resisted those who clamored for independence and often fought with their blood and guts against independence.

Distributive and political conflicts gravely weakened the newly independent Spanish American republics. This helps to explain in part why the second quarter of the nineteenth century was in part a prolonged extension of the civil and international wars that broke out approximately two centuries ago. From Argentina through Peru to New Spain, the half century from the 1810s to the 1860s was in many ways a disastrous time with long-term consequences in human suffering, foregone economic growth, catastrophic political instability, and recurrent warfare. Next to independence itself, this is a key legacy of the processes unleashed in 1808 and more fully in 1810.

A second legacy was the problem of identity. If the national elite lacked a nation, how could it be built? "How to make patriots out of traitors?" asked some who thought unkindly of their adversaries. How to make citizens out of enemies? How to persuade Creole elites to think as José Martí—in a master stroke of propaganda that has served Cuban rulers well down to the present—that there are no blacks and no whites but only Cubans? The newly independent states took decades to rebuild the capacity of the imperial bureaucratic state. The development of schools would await the twentieth century, for the most part, outside of the River Plate, the central valley of Chile, and some other isolated spots. The construction of an identity as Venezuelans that embraced all Venezuelans, we now know more clearly, has taken long enough to explain some of the basis of support today for Presidents Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales, among others.

A third legacy, related to but distinct from the above, is the restoration of a racial order after the painful human toll of the wars of independence. By the sesquicentennial of Spanish American independence, comparisons between race relations in the United States and Latin America looked invariably favorable to the latter. Slavery, some wrote, was not so bad, and racism not so severe under the Spanish Crown and successor republics. A collective amnesia washed over much of the thinking about the terrible violence and racism that had characterized so many who so proudly once called themselves patriots, yet defended slavery or segregation. The process of a restoration of Gramscian hegemony in matters of race is one of the impressive, albeit sad and tragic white elite accomplishments in Spanish America and Brazil, unsuccessfully challenged, with some exceptions, until well into the second half of the twentieth century.

A fourth legacy is the challenge of comparative research. Three empires were battered in the Americas. The British empire in North America split in half—and just in half. The Portuguese empire in South America became independent as a single entity, with the newly independent Brazilian empire beating back local and regional challenges. Only the Spanish empire shattered—why? All too often scholars fail to examine the counterfactual. Suppose New Spain had retained its territory from Costa Rica to Texas and California. Suppose Brazil had splintered as much as independent New Spain did. Suppose Colombia or Argentina had fragmented into smaller pieces.

More generally, why did this variation recur in imperial histories? Other Portuguese colonies (Angola, Mozambique) became independent without shattering, emulating Brazil. Francophone Africa and Francophone Indochina broke apart into many of their components. British India partitioned but independent India did not, even though it seemed vulnerable to fissiparous tendencies. The former Soviet Union broke up into pieces, albeit peacefully for the most part. Little regions can split off (Uruguay, Panama, Kosovo, Slovakia, Abkhazia); big places may stay together (Brazil; the United States in the 1780s; Nigeria despite the Biafran civil war; independent India).

Finally, there is a legacy from the breakdown of the Spanish American empire for the construction of a wider international order. For the most part—with apologies especially to Paraguayans and Bolivians—the *Audiencia* boundaries of Spain's South American empire became the boundaries of the independent republics, and those boundaries, also for the most part and with the same apologies, have endured until our time. *Uti possidetis juris*—the process just described in its international legal formulation—was a Latin American invention in its empirical application, which has contributed to the management of post-imperial international orders ever since. It was replicated during the processes of decolonization in Africa and Asia after World War II and upon the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Violation of the hitherto administrative boundaries of the newly independent countries in Spanish America, Asia, Africa, or the former Soviet Union has been rare, while attempts at the construction of federations grouping those once-administrative units did not fare well (Gran Colombia, the United Arab Republic). Spanish America's principal contribution to the international order upon its independence has been this unacknowledged statecraft.

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Assessing Independence
The Economic Consequences

by Leandro Prados de la Escosura | Universidad Carlos III de Madrid | prados@clio.uc3m.es

DOMÍNGUEZ *continued...*

Endnotes

1 I am grateful to Sebastián Mazzuca for his comments. Errors are mine alone.

2 I first explored these and related themes in *Insurrection or Loyalty: The Breakdown of the Spanish American Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

3 Document from Presidencia de la República, *Las fuerzas armadas de Venezuela en el siglo XIX: La independencia* (1810-1830) (Caracas: Arte, 1963), I, 101, 103.

4 Ibid., I, 305.

5 Quoted in Laureano Valenilla Lanz, *Cesarismo democrático* (Caracas: Tipografía Garrido, 1961), 19. ■

Why did British America and Latin America develop so differently after independence? Failure to achieve sustained and balanced growth over the nineteenth-century, according to Stanley and Barbara Stein, resulted from the persistent colonial heritage. The colonial economic background was reinforced by local conditions (lack of political unity, conflict of economic interests, highly concentrated income and poverty) and, in particular, by British informal imperialism.

Christopher Platt has argued, in turn, that independence had very limited impact in post-colonial Latin America, and only after 1860 was the lagged effect of independence noticeable. The break with Spain, far from confirming the integration of Latin America as a dependent partner in the world economy, "reintroduced an unwelcome half century of 'independence' from foreign trade and finance." Nineteenth century Latin America was, hence, "shaped by domestic circumstances," and economic growth was constrained by lack of human and physical capital, shortage of industrial fuels, and small markets.

The differences between British North American and Iberian American colonies, and their long-run effects on growth, also have been stressed by the new institutional economic historians; their radically different evolution reflected the imposition of distinct metropolitan institutions on each colony. Douglass North's main proposition is that different initial conditions, in particular the religious and political diversity in the English colonies as opposed to uniform religion and bureaucratic administration of the existing agricultural society in the Spanish colonies are behind differences in performance over time.

Why should institutions be taken as entirely external impositions? Initial inequalities of wealth, human capital and political power conditioned, according to Stanley Engerman and Kenneth Sokoloff, institutional design and, hence, performance in Spanish America. Large scale estates, built on pre-conquest social organization and extensive supply of native labor, established the initial levels of inequality. Elites designed institutions protecting their privileges. Government policies and institutions restricted competition and offered opportunities to select groups. This was in sharp contrast with white populations' predominance, evenly distributed wealth and high endowment of human capital per head in British North America.

John Coatsworth and Gabriel Tortella reject the connections between Iberian institutions transferred to America and the initial unequal distribution of income and wealth, stressing that the caste system deliberately weakened the grip of local elites on the indigenous population and limited the growth of wealth inequality by recognizing indigenous property rights and guaranteeing indigenous population access to land.

Factor endowments do not provide, according to North, Summerhill and Weingast, sufficient explanation of post-independence behavior. They stress the sharp institutional contrast between the independent United States (a constitution and well-specified economic and political rights) and post-colonial Latin America (civil and international warfare). In their view, the absence of institutional arrangements capable of establishing cooperation between rival groups led to destructive conflict that diverted capital and labor from production and consigned the new republics to poor performance relative to the United States.