



Indigenous Citizens and Black Republicans: Continuities and Evolutions of Subalterns' Political Visions and Repertoires in Post-independence Colombia and Mexico

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Reading the 1869 words of the pequeño cabildo de Indígenas (indigenous village council) of Riosucio, Colombia, one could easily surmise that nothing in indigenous people's politics had changed since independence (1810–1819), even almost half a century after the fall of the colonial system and the inauguration of new independent nation states in Latin America. The indigenous petitioners begged the governor to shield their *resguardos* (communal landholdings that were self-governed) from farmers who coveted their property, lands 'granted by the king...which

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since the time of our ancestors have been cultivated freely'.¹ Instead of a new republican politics of citizens participating in a democratic polity after independence, indigenous communities—in this and many other petitions from both Colombia and Mexico—seemed not to have abandoned their colonial (or more problematically and inaccurately 'pre-modern') identities and politics at all. Instead, they often relied on petitions (part of the 'traditional set of practices' that Pollmann and te Velde discuss in the Introduction) and a colonially established identity of 'Indígena' (a racial and cultural, but primarily legal category), using a language of misery inherited from the colonial period and pleas for protection from a powerful patron, and employing justifications based on colonial precedents, all used to protect the colonial institution of the *resguardo*. Indigenous politics seemed to exhibit remarkable continuity during the long Age of Revolution.

Until recently, assertions of political continuity between the colonial and national periods in Latin America would hardly be surprising. While, as Pollmann and te Velde note, the European historiography has overprivileged change during the age of Atlantic Revolutions and underestimated continuity, among Latin Americanists the opposite historiographic trends have defined the field. The traditional Latin Americanist historiography emphasized how little things changed from colony to independence (even if these works rarely focused on popular politics and repertoires).² The most important work arguing this point, *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America* by Barbara and Stanley Stein, was a field-defining book emphasizing the immense historical weight of the colonial period in shaping national period Latin America. Another influential book, *Historia contemporánea de América Latina* by Tulio Halperín Donghi, argued that the whole first 60 years after independence was essentially 'a long pause',

¹ Vocales of the pequeño cabildo of Riosucio District (over 300 names) to Governor of the State, Villa de Riosucio, 1 August 1869, Archivo Central del Cauca, Popayán, Colombia (hereafter ACC), Archivo Muerto, package 105, file 74. All translations are mine. I have chosen to not translate the Spanish 'indígena' as 'Indian', in an effort to recognize the complexity of that identity.

² Stanley Stein and Barbara Stein, *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America: Essays on Economic Dependence* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970); Eduardo Galeano, *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* (México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1971); Edward Bradford Burns, *The Poverty of Progress: Latin America in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

continuing the colonial period, until the 1880s.³ More problematically, writers of world history who do not study Latin America have interpreted this vision of colonial continuity as meaning Latin America never really joined ‘modern’ revolutionary societies, seeing new nineteenth-century Latin American states as merely façades of republicanism, failed nations whose subjects cared not a whit about identities beyond the local, and certainly having no role in the story of the development of republicanism and democracy.⁴

However, a new generation of scholars has convincingly challenged these notions of nineteenth-century stagnation and failure. Instead, scholars have begun to uncover a vibrant epoch of political experimentation, driven by both elites and popular actors, and massive changes in both discourses and practices of politics. Latin Americans had created vibrant republics, in which debates over the meanings and values of citizenship, rights, democracy, and popular sovereignty raged; popular groups vociferously claimed citizenship in the new nations and employed a vast repertoire of political practices to enter the public, political sphere.⁵ Instead of continuity, in this new historiography, it seems as if Latin

³ Tulio Halperín Donghi, *Historia contemporánea de América Latina* (Madrid: Alianza, 2005), 135. For this school of thought, only in the 1880s (if you followed economic modernization arguments), the 1930s (political modernization), or the 1960s (revolution), did Latin America finally have a rupture with the colonial past.

⁴ David Saul Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999); Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁵ This literature has grown too large to cite comprehensively, but some key works include François-Xavier Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias. ensayos sobre las revoluciones hispánicas* (Madrid: Mapfre, 1992); Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Post-colonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); James Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World: Creating Modernity, Nation, and Democracy in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Hilda Sabato, *Republics of the New World: The Revolutionary Political Experiment in 19th-Century Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Guy Thompson, ‘Mid-Nineteenth-Century Modernities in the Hispanic World’, in Nicola Miller and Stephen Hart, eds., *When Was Latin America Modern?* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 69–90; Fernando López-Alves, ‘Modernization Theory Revisited: Latin America, Europe, and the U.S. in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century’, *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* 38: 1 (2011), 243–279. For a review of some of these changes, see William Acree, ‘The Promise of a New Nineteenth Century’, *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 53: 2 (2019), 435–447.

Americans had revolutionized their societies' political cultures; new nation states, such as Mexico and Colombia, had not just joined the great Age of Revolution, but would exceed the accomplishments of Europe and the United States, at least in regard to extending citizenship and suffrage rights to racial minorities and working-class men.⁶ Of course, this debate is ongoing, and some scholars are pushing back against the nation- and state-formation historiographic revolution. The premiere journal of Latin American History in the United States, the *Hispanic American Historical Review*, recently changed the organization of its book review section to focus on continuity, from the traditional colonial/modern divide to a tripartite (1) early colonial, (2) eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and (3) twentieth century to the present. Some scholars have begun to argue that perhaps the claims of republican political innovation and liberty were just a discourse created by post-independence liberal creole elites to justify their own rule, often by inventing a supposedly mythical colonial past of repression and subjugation.⁷ So, as opposed to the European historiography, in Latin American Studies the traditional works focused on continuity, while a new generation has stressed change (with even more recent works questioning the extent of this change). Thus, Latin America should provide an interesting counterpoint to the North Atlantic-centred essays in this volume. This essay will attempt to engage these ongoing debates, exploring how different social groups in Latin America understood their own actions in terms of embracing the past or forging a new politics for the future.

Indeed, a closer look at indigenous politics in Colombia and Mexico reveals a much more complex picture than the simple maintenance of a colonial, traditional politics. Instead, indigenous communities were exploiting old practices to control change, deal with new institutions, and find belonging in new nations. They reimagined republican citizenship as a strategic identity in order to protect those colonial rights and privileges in the context of new nation states. They vociferously claimed national citizenship, engaged in heretofore unseen levels of political organizing in pan-resguardo meetings, and exhibited a powerful

⁶ Clément Thibaud, 'Race et citoyenneté dans les Amériques (1770–1910)', *Le Mouvement Social* 252: 3 (2015), 5–19.

⁷ Lina Del Castillo, *Crafting a Republic for the World: Scientific, Geographic, and Historiographic Inventions of Colombia* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 1–25.

knowledge of and engagement with republican party politics. Yet *Indígenas* were presented with a problem: the new category of citizenship, as imagined by Liberal elites, did not recognize ‘*Indígenas*’ as potential citizens, but, rather, desired a universalized subject whose primary identity was in relation to the nation-state—one could be a citizen only by abandoning indigenous identity and lifeways (such as giving up the communal property of *resguardos* for individual private property). Indigenous peoples responded by crafting a new vision of indigenous citizenship—one petition claimed to represent ‘thousands of citizens of the indigenous class’—that claimed the rights of citizenship while also protecting indigenous privileges to local self-government and communal landholding and a particular, rather than universal, identity.⁸ Colombia’s indigenous communities thus reformulated republican notions of equality, away from a juridical and individual definition, towards a definition centred on the creation and maintenance of community and of equal rights to defend that community.

This essay will first explore indigenous politics, and its creative mixture of colonial and republican tropes. I will then briefly turn to a group—Afro-Latin Americans—whose discourse explicitly discounted this volume’s theme of continuities. Afro-Colombians and Afro-Mexicans tended to insist that their politics and identities were new. While it is certainly true that Afro-Latin American communities built upon and maintained customs used to resist slavery, a relative lack of traditional prerogatives or a colonial identity that granted some degree of status helps explain why Afro-Americans, across the hemisphere, played such leading roles, far beyond their numerical weight in society, in fomenting and implementing revolutions and new republican politics. They had little to lose and were thus very eager to imagine a new politics and identity against a despotic old regime. A comparison of indigenous and Afro-Latin American politics in Latin America reveals striking similarities with events around the Atlantic World and helps to develop this volume’s themes, revealing how popular groups played a critical role in the ‘development of citizenship and democracy’; how ‘old repertoires were also used to get

⁸ The *cabildo de Indígenas* of Guachucal and Colimba to Legislators, Guachucal, August 12, 1873, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 124, file 60.

new, revolutionary results'; and how popular actors engaged in collective strategies for 'domesticating the new'.⁹

Indigenous and Afro-American actors negotiated with the new Colombian and Mexican states, that emerged in the 1820s from Spanish colonial rule after long, violent wars for independence. While some petitioners immediately adopted republican and democratic language, others hewed more closely to colonial norms, in the years immediately after independence, as they struggled to adapt to the new regimes.¹⁰ However, by the 1850s, in both Mexico and Colombia, both elite and popular liberals' ascension to power accelerated new discourses of citizenship and rights.¹¹ The ferocious mid-century electoral and military contests in both states between Liberal and Conservative Parties meant that those parties had to negotiate with popular supporters for votes and soldiers. This was not the case everywhere in Latin America, as suggested in Chapter Three by Anna María Stiven for Chile, where a more united elite had less need to bargain with those below.

In Mexico and Colombia, elites and popular groups had to bargain over the meanings of republicanism, thereby transforming politics from the colonial era. I will close by suggesting that while we must recognize the deep continuities with the colonial era—and the at times self-serving discourse of innovation that Liberal elites promulgated to justify their own rule—we must also acknowledge that many people—both wealthy and plebeian—sincerely believed they were living in a new moment, with an innovative politics and novel identities. While recognizing the deep continuities of the past, we must also take seriously that Colombians and Mexicans believed their societies had created a new vision and practice

⁹ See Judith Pollmann and Henk te Velde's "Introduction."

¹⁰ See, for examples, To Emperor Agustín de Iturbide, from 'the female slaves' of Don Isidro González, San Juan November 14, 1822, Archivo General de la Nación, México (hereafter AGNM), Instituciones Gubernamentales: Epoca Moderna y Contemporánea, Administración Pública Federal Siglo XIX (hereafter IG), Fondo Gobernación Siglo XIX, Gobernación, box 54, file 15, sheet 4; 'All the individuals that belong to the parcialidad of Santiago Tlatelolco', to Don Luis Velasquez de la Cadena, México February 4, 1843, AGNM, IG, Fondo Gobernación Siglo XIX, Gobernación, box 259, file 6, sheet 1.

¹¹ James Sanders, *Contentious Republicans: Popular Politics, Race, and Class in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Mallon, *Peasant and Nation*; José Antonio Aguilar Rivera, 'La redención democrática: México 1821–1861', *Historia Mexicana* 69: 1 (2019), 7–41; and Elisa Cárdenas Ayala, 'La escurridiza democracia mexicana', *Alcores. Revista de Historia Contemporánea* 9 (2010), 73–91.

of modernity, and subalterns, both indigenous communities and Afro-Latin Americans, appropriated and refashioned this sense of innovation and modernity to strengthen their positions and make claims on the state and nation.

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Indigenous politics—both its repertoires of action and its discourse—exhibited strong continuities with the colonial regime.¹² Indeed, one of the most common tools in indigenous peoples' repertoire was the petition, a colonial practice now taken into the republican era, during which it was often a constitutionally guaranteed right.¹³ Petitions were both legal requests, but also a form of 'symbolic collective action' that Joris Oddens explores for the Netherlands in Chapter Seven; as in the Netherlands, petitions had remarkable continuity with the old regime, yet popular actors clearly adapted them to the new political reality. Scholars have had some suspicion about using petitions to recover the voice of popular groups, the assumption being that petitions were written by someone other than the signatories (a parish priest or country lawyer, for example) and were just designed to echo what the powerful would have wanted to hear.¹⁴ Certainly, such petitions do exist in the archive.

¹² Marcela Echeverri, *Indian and Slave Royalists in the Age of Revolution: Reform, Revolution, and Royalism in the Northern Andes, 1780–1825* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Eric van Young, *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Struggle for Independence, 1810–1821* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); and Bianca Premo and Yanna Yannakakis, 'A Court of Sticks and Branches. Indian Jurisdiction in Colonial Mexico and Beyond', *The American Historical Review* 124: 1 (2019) 28–55.

¹³ For repertoires, see Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Charles Tilly, 'Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758–1834', *Social Science History* 17: 2 (1993), 253–280; Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Edward Palmer Thompson, *Customs in Common* (New York: The New Press, 1991).

¹⁴ Guerrero asserts that indigenous petitioners are basically ventriloquists' dummies, mouthing words written by intermediaries. Andrés Guerrero, 'The Construction of a Ventriloquist's Image. Liberal Discourse and the 'Miserable Indian Race' in Late 19th-Century Ecuador', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 29: 3 (1997), 555–590. For a theoretical version of this position, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313. For a more nuanced and

However, the majority of petitions in Colombia and Mexico are considerably more nuanced. First, while petitioners often had outside help, petitions were as often the product of local intellectuals; usually someone in a village or community knew how to read and write.¹⁵ While, sometimes requiring stamped paper, many Colombian petitions were written on regular paper; petitions could be mailed, delivered by an intermediary, or by a delegation of the petitioners. Second, in Colombia, petitions were not just a reflection of what the powerful wanted to hear, but instead reveal the petitioners' social, cultural, and popular intellectual world. While all petitions were written to the same President or Congress, indigenous petitioners, Afro-Colombian petitioners, and white or mestizo small farmers used radically different discourses and strategies in their petitions. Afro-Colombians stressed equality and service to the Liberal Party as justification to claim citizenship; Indigenous villagers focused on fraternity and their historic rights and traditions to assert citizenship; while the small farmers focused on liberty and their self-declared moral and cultural superiority to demand citizenship.¹⁶ Third, popular petitions asserted discourses that often contradicted or undermined official rhetoric. In Mexico, even after the Porfiriato (the decades-long rule of Porfirio Díaz from 1876–1911) had abandoned a discourse of democratic republicanism for one of order and development, many popular petitions (unlike those of elites) did not attempt to curry favour with the new political tropes, but held fast to the older language of citizenship and rights.¹⁷ As in Anne Sophie Overkamp's Chapter Five on elite petitioning in the Wupper Valley, elite petitioners in Mexico were more likely

careful consideration of these issues, see Romana Falcón, 'El arte de la petición. Rituales de obediencia y negociación, México, segunda mitad del siglo XIX', *Hispanic American Historical Review* 86: 3 (2006), 467–500; and Marc Becker, 'In Search of Tinterillos', *Latin American Research Review* 47: 1 (2012), 95–114.

¹⁵ See *Gaceta Oficial del Cauca* (Popayán July 10, 1866) for the surprisingly high literacy rates in rural Colombia.

¹⁶ See Sanders, *Contentious Republicans*, 18–57.

¹⁷ See, for example, The Undersigned Residents of Guanajuato State to President, México, March 19, 1877, AGNM, IG, Fondo Justicia, Secretaría de Justicia, vol. 69C, exp. 1431; The Undersigned Residents of San Miguel Tesechoacán to President, México, December 18, 1877, Universidad Iberoamericana, Acervos Históricas, México (hereafter UI), Colección Porfirio Díaz (hereafter CPD), file 2, box 3, no. 1280.

to toe the government's line.¹⁸ These popular actors' political values and discourse mattered more than a simple desire to flatter the powerful or echo a meaningless language in hope of securing a favour. The discourse in these Colombian and Mexican petitions is clearly driven from below, not overly determined from above.

Of course, petitions were still strategic instruments of political practice, designed to accomplish some goal (often related to securing or protecting land, but also involving citizenship and voting rights, village political recognition and authority, taxes, monopolies, or abuse of power, among other issues) and to promote the petitioners' own political standing. Petitions from Indígenas usually began by identifying the petitioners as indigenous authorities (*gobernadores* and *regidores* [officers] of the *cabildo pequeño*, the locally chosen councils that governed Indígenas' *resguardos*), such as in an 1852 document, in which petitioners opened by describing themselves as 'the members of the *cabildo pequeño* de Indígenas of Guachucal parish and Muellamuez vice-parish'.¹⁹ The *cabildos pequeños*, indigenous governors, and the *resguardos* they sought to protect were all colonial institutions.

Indigenous petitioners regularly employed a language of misery and debasement common in the colonial era. The *parcialidad* of Pitayó declared itself 'the most wretched and helpless class of society, we are the mine that everyone exploits'.²⁰ Indígenas from three villages in Colombia described themselves as 'wretched Indios' who 'remain in a state of misery'.²¹ They coupled such self-proclaimed weakness with pleas for protection from patriarchal authority figures—once the king, now an independent emperor (under Iturbide in Mexico) or republican governors or presidents. The *cabildo* from Túquerres noted 'that our wretched

¹⁸ Manuel María Alegre to Minister of Development, no place, 1885, UI, CPD, file 10, box 10, no. 4671.

¹⁹ The Members of the *cabildo pequeño* de Indígenas of Guachucal Parish and the vice-parish of Muellamuez to the Provincial Governor, Guachucal, October 4, 1852, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 53, file 56.

²⁰ Governor and Alcaldes of the *parcialidad* of Pitayó to State Governor, Popayán, November 24, 1858, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 67, file 19.

²¹ Indígenas of Toribio, San Francisco, and Tacueyó to Governor of the State, Toribio, May 25, 1868, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 101, file 60.

and unhappy class has not had any help except that which the truly philanthropic government can offer'.²² The Riosucio petitioners also asked that the state governor listen to their 'weak voice' and act 'as our protector'.²³ A village near Barbacoas begged the national president for 'your powerful protection' against the 'corruption of the municipal officials', echoing the common colonial refrain of the good king versus nefarious local deputies.²⁴

Most powerfully, as with the petition that opened this essay, indigenous actors expressly looked back to the past to justify their political position in the new republican political system.²⁵ The pequeño cabildo of Cumbal, Colombia, protested a neighbouring landholder's appropriation of 'our land that for the space of three centuries and with just titles we have possessed'.²⁶ Decades earlier, an indigenous village in Oaxaca, Mexico appealed to the long tradition of support they had under Spanish law and their 'ancient privileges'.²⁷ Another village noted that they possessed 'our lands following the statutes, customs and uses that we have inherited from our ancestors'.²⁸ A petition from a coalition of indigenous councils in Colombia encapsulates many of these themes. By maintaining their

²² Cabildo de Indígenas of Túquerres to President of the Legislature, Túquerres, July 26, 1871, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 112, file 15.

²³ Vocales of the pequeño cabildo of Riosucio District to Governor of the State. Riosucio, August 1, 1869, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 105, file 74.

²⁴ Indígenas from the Felpí River to President, Barbacoas, June 20, 1866, Archivo del Instituto Colombiano de la Reforma Agraria, Bogotá, Colombia (hereafter INCORA), Bienes Nacionales, vol. 21, p. 482.

²⁵ See also Mark Thurner, *From Two Republics to One Divided: Contradictions of Postcolonial Nationmaking in Andean Peru* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 146–152; Karen Caplan, *Indigenous Citizens: Local Liberalism in Early National Oaxaca and Yucatan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Sergio Paolo Solano and Roicer Alberto Flórez Bolívar, 'Resguardos indígenas, ganadería y conflictos sociales en Bolívar Grande, 1850–1875', *Historia Crítica* 34 (2007), 92–117; and Isidro Vanegas ed., *El siglo diecinueve colombiano* (Bogotá: Ediciones Plural, 2017).

²⁶ Members of the pequeño cabildo of Cumbal to President of the Sovereign State of Cauca, Cumbal, July 29, 1871, Archivo General de la Nación, Bogotá, Colombia, Sección República, Fondo Ministerio de lo Interior y Relaciones Exteriores, vol. 82, p. 986.

²⁷ José de los Santos Contreras for the común de Santa Gertrudis, Oaxaca to Señor, no place or date [1822] AGNM, IG, Fondo Gobernación Siglo XIX, Gobernación, box 18, file 1, 24.

²⁸ Members of the pequeño cabildo of Túquerres to President of the State Legislature, Túquerres, June 1869 (no day on letter), ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 103, file 3.

resguardos, the councils argued, ‘they conserve and respect their ancient moral and religious traditions handed down by their elders; they conserve their habits of obedience and submission to the political authorities, whose service they are at every day; and they also conserve amongst themselves harmony, good customs, good relations, and true fraternity...’.²⁹ Indigenous politics, using the colonial repertoire, referred directly to the colonial past, was enacted by and relied on colonial institutions, cited colonial law, reified tradition, and maintained many aspects of colonial discourse: misery, mercy, protection, and order. It would seem little had changed in the republic.

However, assuming little had changed since the colonial period would be erroneous. Indigenous peoples in Colombia and Mexico quickly adapted to the new republican system, while also not abandoning strategies and discourses from the colonial past in which they believed and which might still serve their interests. They quickly seized upon the identity of the citizen and an insistence on belonging to the nation, to make claims and protect their lifeways. Indígenas from Yascual, Colombia opened their missive ‘using the right to petition that the constitution conceded to every Granadan’.³⁰ Petitioning was part of the colonial repertoire, but was now also a legal, constitutional right, not just a custom.

Caldono’s pequeño cabildo wrote to the provincial governor to ‘implore the protection’ they deserved due to ‘the fact of belonging to the great Granadan family’ and due to their rights guaranteed by ‘our constitution’.³¹ Indígenas from Santiago, Sibundoy, and Putumayo criticized local bureaucrats who treated them as ‘semi-savages... instead of giving us the rights that the laws and constitution of the Cauca [a state

²⁹ Indigenous Alcalde Mayor of Obando Municipality (with signers from the parcialidades of Potosí, Mayasquer, Yaramal, Cumbal, Guachucal, Muellamuez, Colimba, Carlosama, Caserio de Pastas, Pupiales, Anfelima, Girón, Iles, Ospina, and Puerres) to Secretary of State Government, Ipiales, March 4, 1866, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 94, file 54.

³⁰ Colombia was known as Nueva Granada from 1830–1858. Cabildo pequeño de Indígenas of Yascual to President of the Provincial Legislature, Túquerres, October 8, 1852, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 48, file 4.

³¹ Cabildo de Indígenas of the village of Caldono to Provincial Governor, Caldono, November 19, 1853, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 55, file 85.

in southwestern Colombia] grant to all citizens'.³² An indigenous officer from Sibundoy continued, 'We are free citizens, like any other civilized Caucaño, and, therefore, we are confident that you will not ignore our just and well-founded claim'.³³ Contrary to assertions that they were mostly concerned with local affairs, indigenous peoples eagerly claimed citizenship and membership in the nation.

While *Indígenas* were sure they were citizens and demanded to be treated as such, elite Colombians, especially Liberals, were not so willing to concede that identity to the *Indígenas*. Liberals imagined citizenship as a universal identity, that would supplant older, colonial identities based on religion, corporate membership, locality, or race. A petition from the village of Silvia in 1852 demanded the nearby *resguardos* be divided into individual property. The townspeople claimed the new Liberal government had declared 'equality of rights for all New Granadans'. Equality of law required 'that the *Indígenas* become citizens and property holders;... but to the embarrassment of N.G.[Nueva Granada] within its own territory there today exist, forty-two years after Independence, groups of men with the name communities of *Indígenas*'.³⁴ For elite Liberals, republican equality meant all adult men were equal before the law—there was no place for an identity of *Indígena*, be it either legal and corporate or racial. Liberals warned that until *Indígenas* ceased to be governed by special legislation 'they will never become free citizens and active members of the democratic republic'.³⁵

While Liberals sought to create a Manichean divide between the colonial and republican eras and between universal citizenship and a particular corporate identity, Mexico and Colombia's *Indígenas* refused this choice. Instead they formulated their own vision of indigenous citizenship, that combined belonging to the republican nation, with all the constitutional

³² The three *pequeños cabildos* of Santiago, Sibundoy, and Putumayo to State Legislators, Santiago, January 20, 1870, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 112, file 8.

³³ Members of the *cabildo pequeño de Indígenas* and adults of the village of Sibundoy to State President, Sibundoy, November 8, 1874, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 129, file 45.

³⁴ Ellipses in text. Citizens and Residents of Silvia parish (over 45 names) to Senators and Representatives (national), Silvia, March 19, 1852, Archivo del Congreso, Bogotá, Colombia (hereafter ADC), 1852, Senado, Informes de Comisión IV, 137.

³⁵ Anselmo Soto Arana and E. León to Deputies, Popayán, September 9, 1871, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 112, file 2.

rights that guaranteed, with an identity of being ‘Indígena’ and all the particular rights and privileges that identity carried.

Immediately after independence, the village of Santa Marta Chichihualtepec, Oaxaca, in a land dispute with a nearby hacienda, celebrated the new political situation: ‘We enjoy our complete liberty, shed of the yoke that had so much oppressed us everywhere’. They combined this new talk of independence with an older flattery of the new Emperor, ‘V.M.I’ or Your Majesty Iturbide, who only wanted the ‘complete happiness of his children’. The campesinos had travelled to Mexico City to protest against a local landowner who had abused ‘our rights’. They begged Iturbide to relieve them of the ‘miseries and indignities’ they had suffered, and to act quickly as they were ‘dying of hunger at this court due to the lack of resources we have, as we only are eating some hard tortillas that we have brought’.³⁶ Only a few years into a new nation, indigenous people combined an older discourse of misery and protection, and appeals to the king, with a new talk of liberty and rights—all to protect their colonial landholdings that they enjoyed as ‘Indígenas’.

Thirty years later, Indígenas from San Andrés (Guanajuato, Mexico) petitioned to secure lands, citing their ancient, colonial titles, but mixing this with claims to have rights in ‘our Republic’. They closed by noting their treatment was a ‘fate of miserable slavery, unworthy of any country truly Catholic and civilized’.³⁷ This indigenous village thus combined Catholicism, ancient inheritances, modern rights to petition and justice, and calls to a civilization that did not allow the treatment of citizens as slaves.

Indigenous communities easily combined their older discourse with claims on citizenship. Indígenas from Paniquitá, Colombia did not just ask the governor for protection, but for the ‘protection that you dispense to all the citizens’.³⁸ Indígenas from Jambaló, Pitayó, and Quichayá combined the discourse of citizenship, misery, and patriarchy, when they wrote ‘you are the father of us unfortunate citizens’ to the new governor,

³⁶ Pablo Ramires, Alcalde del Ayuntamiento del Pueblo de Santa Marta Chichihualtepec [signed by another] to Señor [Emperor Iturbide], no date or place [1822 or 1823], AGNM, IG, Fondo Justicia, Justicia, vol. 14, file 29, 275.

³⁷ Santiago Avila and eleven others to President, San Andrés Aparco, June 7, 1856, AGNM, IG, Fondo Justicia, Justicia, vol. 546, file 42, 417.

³⁸ Juan Ipia, Alcalde Indígena of Paniquitá to Governor, Popayán, March 15, 1850, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 48, file 57.

hoping for a more sympathetic treatment of their case.³⁹ Indígenas from Colimba and Guachucal opened their request: ‘We implore the conscripted Fathers of the Patria to extend their hand to the thousands of citizens of the indigenous class who, here in the South, are the defenseless victims of the whites’ abuses and attacks’.⁴⁰

The indigenous village of Túquerres encapsulated this vision of indigenous citizenship most succinctly: The indigenous alcalde demanded the state respect ‘our traditions of living communally’ since they were ‘Granadan citizens’.⁴¹ Thus, these villagers deftly combined the rights of universal republican citizenship with their particular traditions, rights, and needs as Indígenas. A small indigenous village near Pasto, Colombia, further explored how they imagined a possible negotiation between universal rights and particular identities:

Since patriarchal times we have possessed our lands communally and we have enjoyed them with the most complete peace and harmony; we do not desire private property, because we make use of communal property with equality and order. We do not desire that the equality of our rights consist of the equal portion of land that we would have, but, rather, in the equal rights in the community that we all possess; in that way there is justice and from justice flows equality.⁴²

Equality for Liberals meant equality before the law. For Indígenas, equality was not just a juridical question, but was tightly linked with the creation and maintenance of community and the insistence on equal rights to defend that community. Equality was not an individual right, but emanated from community. In their struggles, Indígenas resembled local communities in the United States; as Dana Nelson explores in Chapter Nine, for many North Americans, ‘democratic power was grounded in obligation and mutual commitment’. These communities appreciated

³⁹ Governors of Pitayó, Jambaló, and Quichayá to Governor, Jambaló, August 1, 1859, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 74, file 51.

⁴⁰ The cabildo de Indígenas of Guachucal and Colimba to Legislators, Guachucal, August 12, 1873, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 124, file 60.

⁴¹ Alcalde mayor Indígena y los cabildos pequeños de la provincia de Túquerres to presidente de la Cámara de Representantes, Túquerres, December 30, 1848, ADC, 1849, Cámara, Informes de Comisiones IX, 184.

⁴² Pequeño cabildo de Indígenas of Genoy to President of the Legislature, Pasto, August 15, 1877, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 137, file 18.

republican equality, but sought to incorporate it into their own particular needs and histories.

Colombia's and Mexico's Indígenas were wrestling, with some success I must add, with some of the problems that most bedevil modern democracies: How does a democracy, in which the majority should rule, guarantee rights to a minority? How can societies push for universal equality and citizenship but also respect and protect particular identities (be they religious, cultural, or in this case corporative and racial)? I am not arguing that the region's Indígenas solved these problems, but I am arguing they made impressive and creative efforts to address them, combining indigenous colonial identities and institutions with republican citizenship, in a way that secured a place for themselves as citizens of a nation, but that also sought to protect their historical traditions and cultures. They combined universalism with particular experience, culture, and needs. They created a vision of indigenous citizenship that appropriated the very real benefits of republican citizenship while not obligating them to abandon their communities, lands, or identities. The Indígenas had found a balance between a universal citizenship that sought inclusion, while denying that inclusion had to entail homogenization and erasure of their identities and rights. The success of negotiating citizenship has strongly echoed in indigenous communities' organizing until the present day, culminating in their winning guaranteed protections of their communal landholdings, local self-government, and national political representation in the 1991 Colombian constitution.⁴³

If indigenous peoples sought a balancing act between the old and new regimes, embracing republican politics while maintaining many continuities with the colonial era, Afro-Latin Americans usually took a far

⁴³ See Joanne Rappaport and Robert Dover, 'The Construction of Difference by Native Legislators: Assessing the Impact of the Colombian Constitution of 1991', *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 1: 2 (1996), 22–45; Peter Wade, 'Negros, indígenas e identidad nacional en Colombia', François-Xavier Guerra and Monica Quijada eds., *Imaginar la nación* (Munster: Lit, 1994), 257–288; and Brett Troyan, *Cauca's Indigenous Movement in Southwestern Colombia: Land, Violence and Ethnic Identity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

different tack.⁴⁴ Colombians and Mexicans of African descent almost always tended to insist the republican era marked a sharp, decisive break with the past—and they framed their political identities more exclusively around republican citizenship and republican equality and liberty, in contrast with their imagining of the old regime as characterized by slavery, oppression, and the caste system.

Immediately upon Mexican independence (1821), José Trinidad Martínez, ‘native of Africa, born in la Habana’, wrote to Emperor Iturbide in 1823 to claim his freedom. Martínez argued that freedom was his right, now that ‘the sweet echo of liberty’ rang in Mexico. He excoriated Spanish rule, that had made people ‘slaves only by the domination of their government’. With an independent Mexico, slavery should end. ‘With what delight, with what universal jubilee, have we celebrated the liberty that the Emperor declared in the Mexican Empire’. This declared liberty must signify abolition. Echoing Iturbide’s Plan de Iguala, Martínez asked how could it be ‘that all the inhabitants of this vast continent were free and only I a slave, without any crime other than being a descendent of Africans’. Martínez requested that Iturbide order his liberty, ‘restoring to me the rights that God, nature, and the nation have granted me’.⁴⁵ Martínez did not seek to establish continuities with a Spanish past, but to cast that past as despotic, the antithesis of the present liberty he would enjoy as a citizen.

Not just Afro-Mexican men tried to claim this citizenship and freedom. A year before Martínez, a group of female slaves wrote the Emperor, eagerly demanding their freedom from enslavement as their ‘natural right’ which they could claim as the Plan of Iguala had declared ‘that all

⁴⁴ For Afro-Colombians and Mexicans, see Marixa Lasso, *Myths of Harmony: Race and Republicanism during the Age of Revolution, Colombia, 1795–1831* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007); Ben Vinson III and Matthew Restall eds., *Black Mexico: Race and Society from Colonial to Modern Times* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009); and Laura Lewis, *Chocolate and Corn Flour: History, Race, and Place in the Making of “Black” Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Alfonso Múnera, *El fracaso de la nación: Región, clase y raza en el Caribe colombiano (1717–1810)* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1998).

⁴⁵ José Trinidad Martínez to Señor, no date or place, received in México, January 16, 1823, AGNM, IG, Fondo Justicia, Justicia, vol. 22, file 3, 8.

the inhabitants of this America are Citizens'.⁴⁶ What appealed to these women was precisely the newness of the current political moment, when nothing was settled, when it seemed possible that even enslaved women might take a seat at the table of the nation. Years later, in Popayán, Colombia, Sebastiana Silva petitioned the local government for help in the return of her son, who was forced to work for a family as a domestic servant. The family refused to return her son, 'as if we still were in the barbarous times in which the government allowed the slavery of men. Today, thankfully, we have a republican and democratic government that will not allow such monstrosities'.⁴⁷ Silva, a poor, most probably Afro-Colombian woman, contrasted the 'barbarous times' of the colonial era, so associated with slavery in Afro-Colombian minds, with republican liberty. Women, both slave and free, were usually disappointed by their gendered exclusion from republican citizenship, but enslaved and freedmen held fast to the idea that new nations, soon to be republican across the Americas after Iturbide fell (in 1823), would be a much more welcoming political space for them than the colonial regime.

As with Martínez and Silva, Afro-Colombians regularly contrasted their past position as slaves with their new position as republican citizens. Petitioners from the San Julián hacienda opened their request by noting their changed status, 'The undersigned residents of the parochial district of Caloto, and inhabitants of the San Julián hacienda to which once we belonged as slaves, before you in the use of our rights as citizens...'.⁴⁸ The petitioners contrasted their former enslaved condition with their new identity as citizens with rights. From the coastal village of San Juan, ex-slaves wrote to the Liberal-dominated national Congress after abolition (1851), to thank them for 'the precious possession of liberty, so long usurped, and with it all the other rights and prerogatives of citizens'.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ To Emperor Agustín de Iturbide, from 'the female slaves' of Don Isidro González, San Juan, November 14, 1822, AGNM, IG, Fondo Gobernación Siglo XIX, Gobernación, box 54, file 15, 4.

⁴⁷ Sebastiana Silva to Jefe Municipal, Popayán, October 13, 1874, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 129, file 39.

⁴⁸ Inhabitants of the San Julián hacienda to Governor, San Julián, October 15, 1853, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 55, file 92.

⁴⁹ Residents of San Juan (24 names, all signed with an X) to Citizen Senators and Representatives (national), no place or date on letter, but 1852, ADC, 1852, Senado, Proyectos Negados II, 19.

The Afro-Colombian boatmen (bogas) of the river Dagua, who ferried passengers and goods from the Pacific Coast to the central Cauca River valley, asserted their place as citizens in a labour dispute: 'We should be treated like citizens of a republic and not like the slaves of a sultan'.⁵⁰

In Afro-Colombians' imagination, the colonial period offered nothing but slavery and despotism, while the republican era offered the hope of inclusion. Afro-Colombian gatherers of forest products near Tumaco wrote to the President to protest how investors now claimed the forest as private property, complaining these capitalists wanted to impose the 'tyranny of feudalism'.⁵¹ They contrasted the past—associated with backwardness—with a present in which their voices should be heard. Cali's Democratic Society, whose membership included many Afro-Colombians, wrote in 1877 to demand land for the landless veterans of the past civil war against Conservatives. The veterans claimed they had fought for 'liberty' against the Conservatives who saw them as the 'slaves of these so-called feudal lords'. This war had pitted those who enjoyed 'great wealth and immense landholdings' against 'the poor masses'. Now soldiers demanded payment from a Liberal state that claimed to rule in the name of liberty and republican democracy. They demanded land so that they could fully be 'citizens of a free people'.⁵² These petitioners created their own history, moving from colonialism, slavery, inequality, and feudal lords to republican citizenship and the equality that equitable landholding would bring.

Afro-Colombian demands for land, in sharp contrast to doctrinaire liberalism, reveal how older pre-liberal ideas of governance, that, as Gary Gertle describes, 'held the public good in higher esteem than private right', had a very different result when wielded by popular groups. While in the United States, Gerstle argues this power often worked to perpetuate hierarchy and inequality, both Afro-Colombians and Indígenas used conceptions of the public welfare to argue against inequality

⁵⁰ The bogas of the Dagua River to State President, Cali, May 15, 1878, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 144, file 64.

⁵¹ José del Carmen Castillo and others to President, Tumaco, December 12, 1875, INCORA, Bienes Nacionales, vol. 10, 49.

⁵² The undersigned members of the Democratic Society to Citizen President of the State, Cali, June 1, 1877, ACC, Archivo Muerto, package 137, file 7.

and classical liberalism.⁵³ Both groups used notions of public welfare—emerging out of popular conceptions of republicanism (or to use Dana Nelson’s terminology from Chapter Nine, ‘vernacular democracy’) and older conceptions of community in Latin America, to argue the state could move against individual property rights: Indígenas to maintain corporate landholding, Afro-Colombians to demand the right to claim untilled private property (held by large haciendas) as their own smallholdings. Across the Atlantic World, contests to define state power, order, and public welfare would rage until the 1870s, when conservative visions of power and order emerged triumphant.

Saddled with a colonial identity marked by slavery, Afro-Latin Americans were not eager to remember continuities with the colonial past.⁵⁴ Republicanism and universalism held great appeal to Afro-Latin Americans, with an inherited colonial identity based on slavery and caste discrimination. This is not to say Afro-Latin Americans did not have or value a particular cultural identity, but that they did not see this as incompatible with pursuing equality as citizens within the nation-state. Unlike Indígenas, their particular identity did not carry with it valuable landholdings (recognized by the state) or political traditions in the form of local councils they controlled for self-government. Universalism, so threatening to Indígenas’ cultural, political, and material survival, seemed in the nineteenth century to only be advantageous to Afro-Latin Americans fighting against slavery and racial discrimination.⁵⁵ They advocated for and fought for popular liberal and republican principles not just in Colombia and Mexico, but across the Americas. In (at least) Cuba, Brazil, Uruguay, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Peru, Afro-Latin Americans supported popular

⁵³ Gary Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 56.

⁵⁴ Colonial petitions from the same Colombian region focused on religiosity, labour, poverty, loyalty, requests for protection from and good relations with the king (although the continued desire to secure lands is a continuity along with notions of the public good and nefarious powerful landlords). Hugues R. Sánchez Mejía and Jorge Conde Calderón, ‘Entre la asignación de privilegios, el Estado y la causa pública. Tierras y oratorio para el asiento de libres de Quilichao, Popayán, 1750–1810’, *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* 46: 1 (2019), 59–83.

⁵⁵ As Diederik Smit’s Chapter Four on the Dutch provinces shows, the contest between universalism and particularism was common across the Atlantic World.

liberal or republican movements (as, of course, did African-Americans in the United States).⁵⁶

I am not arguing that Afro-Colombians and Afro-Mexicans did not experience continuities with the colonial period—indeed their tradition of military service was central to their colonial repertoire of politics and to their identity as citizen-soldiers in a republic—but, rather, that they imagined and asserted a sharp break with the past.⁵⁷ Afro-Latin Americans invested republicanism with far greater emancipatory potential than elite politicians ever imagined, and in order to do this, they also imagined a history of colonialism defined by slavery and racism versus republican liberty and equality. In this intellectual creation of republican modernity, they were not alone.

In general, across the Americas by mid-century, the public sphere rang with a discourse of American republican modernity.⁵⁸ In this countermentality to visions of modernity emanating from Europe or the United States, Latin Americans defined a modernity not bound to cultured Europe and its civilization, but celebrated an imagined modernity located in America, a modernity whose definition was inherently political. Latin America represented the future because it had adopted republicanism and democracy while Europe, under the boot of monarchs and the aristocracy, dwelled in the past. American republican modernity emphasized republican politics, citizenship, rights, and a nation defined by popular sovereignty as the most important markers of modernity (as opposed to European high culture, industrial growth, or technological and military innovations). The 1857 Mexican Constitutional Congress's justification to the nation stressed how the proposed constitution emanated from 'the dogma of the pueblo's sovereignty', noting all 'modern societies' use the representative system.⁵⁹ This constitution, 'the most democratic the

⁵⁶ George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Alejandro de la Fuente and George Reid Andrews eds., *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁵⁷ David Sartorius, *Ever Faithful: Race, Loyalty, and the Ends of Empire in Spanish Cuba* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Echeverri, *Indian and Slave Royalists*; and Ben Vinson III, *Before Mestizaje: The Frontiers of Race and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁵⁸ Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World*.

⁵⁹ León Guzmán, Isidoro Olvera and José Antonio Gamboa, "El Congreso Constituyente á la Nación," February 5, 1857, *Constitución Federal de los Estados-Unidos*

Republic has had', would propel the nation 'along the path of progress and reform, civilization, and liberty'.⁶⁰ The Congress also stressed how quickly modernity moved in the nineteenth century: 'humanity advances day by day, necessitating incessant innovation in its political and social mode of being'.⁶¹ Only through 'political and social revolution' could Mexico maintain its position in a nineteenth century whose 'spirit's movement does not rest'.⁶² The Mexican Constitutional convention thus stressed both how modernity was defined by republican politics and how this politics marked an innovative, decisive break with the past.

The modern republican nation was constantly contrasted with both contemporary monarchies and aristocracies in Europe and with American societies' own colonial pasts. In this vision, as one Mexican orator noted, modernity began with independence, when the Americas broke from a barbarous Spain, and 'exchanged liberty for slavery, justice for arbitrary despotism, enlightenment for ignorance and fanaticism, civilization for heinous customs of barbarism, and finally, our new institutions for those stale ones of subjecthood'.⁶³ The Chilean Francisco Bilbao castigated Spain for the legion of difficulties the Americas faced: 'With Spain came Catholicism, monarchy, feudalism, the Inquisition, isolation, silence, depravity, the genius of exterminating intolerance, and the culture of blind obedience'.⁶⁴ In short, 'Spain is the Middle Ages. We are the future'.⁶⁵ Europe had yet to make this transition to modernity. A Chilean paper argued that the Americas enjoyed a 'decisive superiority' over Europe, due to republicanism. The New World had already progressed further down the road of modernity and civilization than had Europe: 'America, throwing off the iron collar of colonialism, already has completed the great revolution, the great transformation, the grand execution of the past' while Europe still suffered monarchs

Mexicanos, sancionada y jurada por el Congreso General Constituyente (México: Imprenta de Ignacio Cumplido, 1857), 16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 21, 22.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 19, 22.

⁶³ Speech of Mariano Murillo, Chihuahua, September 15, 1862, *La Alianza de la Frontera - Suplemento* (Chihuahua September 23, 1862).

⁶⁴ Francisco Bilbao, 'El evangelio americano', Manuel Bilbao ed., *Las obras completas de Francisco Bilbao*, 2 (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de Buenos Aires, 1865), 338.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 377.

and caudillos.⁶⁶ The past was the ‘iron collar of colonialism’—it was slavery, despotism, and fanaticism—hardly an epoch in which to look for appropriate and useful political rhetoric and practice.

While Latin Americans imagined that the process of breaking with the past began with independence, the struggle would continue through the nineteenth century. Post-independence civil wars were due to those who had not given up on the past, those who ‘have conspired by every excessive means to implant in our young nation the anguished and invalid institutions of Old Europe’.⁶⁷ The Colombian Ramón Mercado argued that Independence had not really changed the colonial system, as ‘the war against Spain was not a revolution’; it had not ended slavery, the power of the Church, or the aristocracy, and most were still excluded from a role in governance.⁶⁸ It would take the ‘social revolution’ of liberal reforms to truly remake society, a revolution carried out by the poor and dispossessed who ‘contributed to the triumph of Democracy’.⁶⁹ By 1852, Colombian President José Hilario López declared in a speech that ‘a social revolution’ had occurred as ‘the reign of democracy and liberty had arrived’ to destroy the ‘feudalism of the Middle Ages’ which still oppressed society, specifically referring to slavery.⁷⁰ In this vision, only after social revolutions had abolished slavery and instituted universal adult, male citizenship had modernity and truly new societies been obtained in the Americas.⁷¹

In general, Latin American writers, orators, and politicians created a sharp contrast between the past and the present. The rioplatense-born Héctor Varela, writing from Paris, argued that the New World marked the end of the ‘Middle Ages’ in which Europe and Christianity were

⁶⁶ *El Ferrocarril* (Santiago June 29, 2020) reprinted in *La Nación* (Montevideo December 19, 1860).

⁶⁷ *La República* (Chihuahua September 18, 1868).

⁶⁸ Ramón Mercado, *Memorias sobre los acontecimientos del Sur, especialmente en la Provincia de Buenaventura, durante la administración del 7 de marzo de 1849* (Cali: Centro de Estudios Históricos y Sociales ‘Santiago de Cali’, 1996 [originally published 1853]), vii.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xviii, xcv.

⁷⁰ José Hilario López, *Mensaje del Presidente de la Nueva Granada al Congreso Constitucional de 1852* (Bogotá: Imprenta del Neo-Granadino, 1852), 1.

⁷¹ This discourse also helps to explain why the mid-century is so important for exploring the long Age of Revolution; for many Colombians and Mexicans, the true revolutionary moment was not independence, but the reforms instigated by Liberals in the 1850s and 1860s.

champions of civilization. Now, however, the Americas had progressed beyond Europe in their adoption of ‘the democratic doctrine’, liberty, rights, and state institutions, but most especially, ‘the Republic’, which was ‘the definitive form of our spirit’. Varela asserted, ‘Taking this point of view, one can say that the New World is the most potent incarnation of the modern spirit’. The New World was modern, and if Europe would listen, it could learn valuable lessons to help bring about ‘universal democracy’.⁷² The nineteenth century—in the words of Benito Juárez, ‘the first century of the pueblos’—belonged to the Americas.⁷³

However, the fight was ongoing. The nineteenth century marked a decisive break with the past, but that past was not defeated. Monarchies, aristocracies, empires, filibusters, and slaveholders threatened to undo the century’s progress. Juan de Dios Restrepo, writing from Buga, evoked the clash of civilizations—European monarchy versus American republics: ‘The situation of America is dire; the fight is between the colonial system and the modern liberal spirit, between the paganism of the Roman priests and the evangelical Christian idea, between those that dream of re-establishing slavery, privilege, monarchy, theocracy and those that believe that all of those abominations should remain in Europe’.⁷⁴ This powerful rhetoric suggests why so many nineteenth-century Latin Americans—elite and popular alike—were so eager to jettison the past and were not likely to look for continuities in their politics.

And this discourse was not just for elites. A protest from a small northern Mexico mining town signed by fifty-four ‘citizens’, many illiterate, promised that the signatories would fight against the French soldiers who had invaded Mexico. The undersigned, most probably miners, claimed they were ‘true republicans’ that hated monarchy since it was fit only for ‘vile slaves’: ‘We do not want to be the lackeys or lapdogs of any monarch’. They attacked their enemies as the ‘notables’

⁷² Héctor F. Varela, ‘El Americano. Sus prospectos y su misión’, *El Americano* (Paris March 7, 1872).

⁷³ Speech of Benito Juárez, México, January 10, 1861 in *La Alianza de la Frontera - Suplemento* (Chihuahua March 9, 1861).

⁷⁴ Emiro Kastos [Juan de Dios Restrepo], ‘La Guerra’, Buga, January 13, 1864, *El Caucaño* (Cali January 21, 1864).

and moneylenders who were in league with the French.⁷⁵ American republican modernity provided a potent language with which to promote popular visions against the interest of the ‘notables’ and the rich—as we saw with the petitions from Afro-Colombians above. While certainly the colonial system had similar tools, American republican modernity’s emphasis on a sharp break with the past made such openly colonial rhetoric and practices suspect.

This discourse of American republican modernity—which dominated the public sphere in much of Spanish America from the 1840s through the 1870s—offered popular groups powerful discursive tools with which to promote their inclusion in the nation and society. An orator rallying the pueblo against the French declared that while citizenship in the past may have held little value, ‘today all Mexicans know that the title of Citizen is not a word with no meaning’, but guarantees ‘the rights of man in society’.⁷⁶ Mexico’s *El Monitor Republicano* asserted that ‘public power’ came from the ‘true, spontaneous, general, and simultaneous emission of the pueblo’s suffrage’, and power should not be in the hands of one man (monarchy) or ‘a reduced circle, under the pompous title of notables’.⁷⁷ The state must respond to popular demands, as petitions constantly insisted throughout the nineteenth century. American republican modernity helps to explain why Afro-Latin Americans, and many other actors, both popular and elite, were not eager to find continuities with the past. If their nations’ political systems were built upon a justification of republican politics with a colonial past imagined as defined by slavery, subjecthood, and degradation, then it became much harder for powerful elites to promote slavery, to restrict citizenship, and to ignore their pueblo. Popular groups could cast attacks on their rights as essentially anti-republican and anti-modern. Yes, this vision of the barbaric Spanish past was often a self-serving invention of republican elites,⁷⁸ but

⁷⁵ The undersigned, residents of Guadalupe y Calvo, “Protesta en contra de la intervención francesa,” Guadalupe y Calvo, August 28, 1863 in *La Alianza de la Frontera* (Chihuahua September 12, 1863).

⁷⁶ Speech of Joaquín H. Domínguez, Villa de Allende, September 16, 1862 in *La Alianza de la Frontera - Suplemento* (Chihuahua November 20, 1862).

⁷⁷ *El Monitor Republicano* (México July 1, 1867).

⁷⁸ Del Castillo, *Crafting a Republic for the World*.

one that popular groups could utilize to promote their own emancipatory visions. Promoting tradition simply was not useful for many popular groups.

As historians, it is certainly our prerogative to look beyond our historical actors' understanding of their present. And if we want to construct a more accurate and meaningful political history, we should strive to understand these deep continuities that these actors might have been unaware of or intentionally ignored or misremembered. Colombia's indigenous communities themselves certainly understood the importance of continuity and valuing the past. However, we must also never lose sight of the lived experience of our historical actors and what their politics meant to them. When Afro-Latin Americans made claims about a feudal past and a democratic present, we can certainly critique this. However, we must not neglect how meaningful, powerful, and emancipatory these claims were for them. Afro-Colombians won the abolition of slavery and full citizenship rights with these claims of republican innovation. A discourse of American republican modernity that coursed through Spanish American societies around mid-century gave powerful tools to popular actors, that they eagerly embraced. Others, such as indigenous communities, maintained more of a connection with the past, but they nevertheless created innovative solutions to adapt to the republican present. Both Afro-Colombians and Indígenas adapted traditional political practices, in intellectually creative ways, to advance their interests and political visions after the Age of Revolution. Even if we can assert that popular claims of a new discourse and politics were not as 'real' as they imagined, the rights popular actors won and lifeways they protected were very real indeed.

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