

## WARTIME WORDS AND WORLD VIEWS: *Six Recent Books on Spanish American Independence*

Patrick Griffin. *The Age of Atlantic Revolution: The Fall and Rise of a Connected World*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023. \$40.00 cloth.

Milagros Martínez-Flener. *¿Independencia inevitable? La América española en los informes de los diplomáticos austríacos en España, 1808-1825*. Madrid: Editorial Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas CSIC, 2022. \$13.50 paper; \$4.00 e-book.

Mariano Martín Schlez. *The Woodbine Parish Report on the Revolutions in South America, 1822: The Foreign Office and Early British Intelligence on Latin America*. Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2022. \$130.00 cloth; \$94.00 e-book.

Martín Bowen-Silva. *The Age of Dissent: Revolution and the Power of Communication in Chile, 1780-1833*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2023. \$95.00 cloth; \$34.95 paper; \$95.00 e-book.

Rodrigo Escribano Roca. *Memorias del viejo imperio. Hispanoamérica en las culturas políticas de España y el Reino Unido, 1824-c.1850*. Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2022. \$34.00 paper; \$28.00 e-book.

Nicole von Germeten. *The Enlightened Patrolman: Early Law Enforcement in Mexico City*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022. \$99.00 cloth; \$30.00 paper; \$30.00 e-book.

It is a feature of modern nationhood that a declaration of independence is reified as a key inflection point, a specific moment in time during which a region and its people cease to be beholden to something else and begin to chart their own collective course. Independence thus represents both an end and a beginning. It is both a process and a goal. Independence is usually understood as a political act, a metaphorical coming of age, a goal achieved, and an event that brings hope. This collection of six recent books on independence in Age of Revolutions across the Atlantic world fit together to show how wartime worlds and worldviews may not fit as neatly into the textbook national story. They share an intellectual project of moving beyond the

usual actors and narrative trajectories to introduce us to new perspectives on the events by looking at different regions and demographics: Austrian diplomats, British Foreign Office bureaucrats, Irish radicals, New England whalers, African traders, Chilean popular classes, Mexico City's night watchmen, and many others. These six authors tug at the standard chronology of Atlantic independence as well, pulling it back to the 1770s and extending its living impact into the 1850s. Taken together, they remind us that independence is a tricky concept, one that can look quite different depending on one's place in a broader matrix. Wars eventually end, but combative words and unreconciled worldviews collide and continue the struggle.

Patrick Griffin is the Thomas Moore and Judith Livingston Director of the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies as well as the Madden-Hennebry Professor of History and has written a general history in *The Age of Atlantic Revolution*. Its subtitle, *The Fall and Rise of a Connected World*, signals Griffin's vision of a structural transformation across four continents in which "the experiences of those on the very edges of the system proved a harbinger of what was to come and what would define the period as an age" (3). As one would expect, the book begins with the American and French Revolutions and continues through the liberatory events in Haiti and the Iberian empires. Griffin's emphasis on entanglement reflects the recent popularity of that concept as an interpretive framework, something he underscores with the verbs and adjectives of his book chapters: "tangled," "disentangling," "connection," "Gordian knot," "web of war," "singeing the fray," and "reknitting the fabric." Griffin's interpretation of the Age of Revolutions stresses that "as much as by new concepts of the person, of governance, and of the economy, the period was defined by broad systemic shifts to which people had to adapt" (3). In other words, the Age of Atlantic Revolutions was not just about warfare; it was about words and changing worldviews on multiple axes.

Originally from Perú, Milagros Martínez-Flener earned her PhD at the University of Vienna. She is an affiliated researcher with the Independencias Americanas at the Universitat Jaume I in Valencia, where she completed her MA. Her book *¿Independencia inevitable? La América española en los informes de los diplomáticos austríacos en España, 1808-1825* grew out of her curiosity about what Austrian diplomats in Madrid reported back to their foreign minister—the conservative power broker Prince Klemens von Metternich—about events in Spanish America and Spanish actions (and reactions). Given Austria's historical and dynastic connections with the Spanish Habsburg Empire and its geographical location in the center of continental Europe, it is, indeed, surprising that scholars have not yet had much to say about its role as a Spanish ally, intermediary, sounding board, and advocate for stability, monarchy, and

traditional, high-level negotiated approaches to border adjustment. Martinez-Flener argues that Austria's weakening position in Europe, coupled with its desire to gain access to American resources, perhaps led its diplomats to be more clear-eyed than their Iberian counterparts about the likely inevitability of Spanish American independence. As she notes "their dispatches offer an image of a Spain torn apart by its struggles against both internal and external enemies," never ceasing to emphasize an infinity of problems and weaknesses in the Bourbon approach to their rebellious American territories that undercut their own goal of retaining imperial control (12).

Mariano Martín Schlez is a CONICET-supported researcher and historian at the Universidad Nacional del Sur at Bahía Blanca in Argentina. His research interests focus on the relationship between Río de la Plata/Argentina and Great Britain from the perspectives of informal empire, dependent capitalism, neocolonial pacts, and the imperialism of free trade. While visiting the Royal Geographical Society in London to consult its small Woodbine Parish collection, Schlez encountered a small notebook catalogued under the title "South America. Volume containing printed and manuscript reports prepared for the Congress of Verona, 1822." Parish had been Lord Castlereagh's private secretary and this collection was apparently compiled for George Canning's edification and preparation at a crucial moment of diplomatic realignment. As Schlez observes, "it was probably the first report on the revolutions in South America commissioned by the [British] Foreign Office" (2). The Parish Report provides a snapshot of the state of knowledge about political and military conditions at that specific moment and the information matrix in which the British government made its policy calculations. Schlez has provided an excellent, extensive, ninety-two-page introduction in which he surveys both the historical context in which Parish produced his report and the historiographical context in which modern readers should approach it. His sophisticated analysis takes pains to show "how this knowledge is mediated by class antagonism and power relations (on a national and international scale)," which tended to bend foreign policy toward serving the economic interests of the merchants and manufacturers (3).

Martín Bowen-Silva is Associate Professor of History at New York University, Abu Dhabi campus. His book *The Age of Dissent: Revolution and the Power of Communication in Chile, 1780-1833* opens a window into the unexplored realm of daily life of regular folk and their changing mentalities. It is deeply researched and well-written. Bowen-Silva masterfully moves between empire and frontier, between high culture and popular sentiment, between print media and material culture. This may sound easy to do, but it is most certainly is not. Through extensive archival research across many types of records (print press,

judicial, police, bureaucratic, mercantile, personal correspondence, art history), Bowen-Silva is able to convey subtle changes in attitude and behavior among Chilean residents over time and across class and racial divides. Using insights from literary and art history (the “gaze”), and influenced by historians of the French school (*mentalités*, festivals, emotions), Bowen-Silva documents the ways in which high-level politics trickled down and out into the streets as residents began sorting themselves into partisan groups in visual and mimetic ways. Some Chileans adopted outer displays like changes in their dress or salutations and the wearing of patriotic emblems in order to signal their identification with the new republican regime; others used similar methods to resist it or to protect themselves by appearing to blend in with the new orthodoxy. Humor, sarcasm, mockery, and insults ran alongside and subverted the more formal displays of official patriotism. Although these tactics were deployed with great subtlety and skill during the colonial period, Bowen-Silva argues that the independence era introduced “a profane and political landscape. This represented an absolute departure from colonial politics which were organized around the principles of transcendence and unity” (5).

Rodrigo Escribano Roca is Assistant Professor in the School of Liberal Arts at the Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez in Santiago de Chile. His deeply-researched book traces the intellectual history of the disintegration of the Spanish Empire and the emergence of its successor states by considering the way in which it was documented in the political (mainly print) cultures of Spain and Great Britain. What makes this study particularly exciting is the way in which Escribano Roca’s begins his discussion of the meaning and process of Spanish America’s independence in the 1820s, after the military battles were won and formal diplomatic recognition was achieved; this shift in attention allows him to juxtapose well-known writers and thinkers in new configurations, such as his discussion of the works of José María Blanco White alongside those of Karl Marx. Similarly, by locating his analysis in the early mid-century decades, he is able to highlight the very serious and real cleavages that became apparent once independence had been achieved: how to reconcile the Iberian past with the American present and future; issues of race, slavery, and abolition; the emerging tension between the middle and merchant classes and the aristocratic elites; how European monarchies had to recast their legitimacy as republicanism grew in force; and the emergence of a new spectrum of political ideologies that went beyond classical liberalism to introduce new social forces rooted in anarchism, socialism, and reactionary anti-liberalism.

Nicole von Germeten is Professor of Latin American History and Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Oregon. She has produced a fascinating and carefully researched historical and sociological study of the

efforts to impose order on the nightlife in Mexico City's streets during in an era marked by conspiracy, upheaval, and increasing racialized tension. She examines debates over important new technologies for street illumination, as well as the process by which a new employment category—night watchmen—was created, staffed, disciplined, and rewarded. Von Germeten's insights derive from a thorough reading of thousands of entries found in the Mexico City night watchmen's logbooks, known as the *Libros de Reos*, from which she and her students created an extensive database. Her research revealed a literal ground truth: that "successful law enforcement requires an ongoing negotiation with the general populace" (245). It was a give-and-take process, in which the "people whom the guards met on the street actually had more influence on how they carried out their duties than the directives that they received from on high" (245). The book is not only full of fascinating society-level observations, but it also expertly weaves in the night watchmen's own thoughts, experiences, and ambitions along with the amusing, often frightening, always human struggles of those hapless souls prowling the streets at night.

In this collection of six recent books, one of the most obvious trends is their interest in excavating voices and experiences of people whose engagement with events took place around the edges of the core nation-making story of the Atlantic Revolutions as it is usually told. In many ways, the authors' own life trajectories permit them to look at events literally from different geographic perspectives. Escribano Roca's doctoral work took place across several institutions including the Universidad de Alcalá in Spain, Western Sydney University in Australia, and the University of California, San Diego. In his bibliography, the periodical press sources alone include an astonishing eighty titles from Ireland, Scotland, England, Spain, Cuba, and Mallorca with editorial lines that reflect the full spectrum of British and Spanish society, ranging from the Socialist Workers' Party to the *Court and Lady's Magazine*. Martínez-Flenor's book is based on highly-original research in the Belgian National Archives, the Archives of the Hanseatic City of Lübeck, and both the Diocesan Archive and Österreichisches Staatsarchiv in Vienna. In Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Prussia, Russia, and the Papal States, there were active communities of merchants, armament makers, financiers, literary figures, and religious bureaucracies who all followed Atlantic events closely and sought out opportunities to advance their own interests. In his general history of the Atlantic Revolutions, Griffin includes the Irish Rebellion of 1798, adds Daniel O'Connell to the list of great national icons, and devotes much ink to the transnational Irish diaspora's activities. Like recent historiographical trends that have integrated the Philippines, China, and India into the study of colonial Latin American history, these books suggest that there are new frontiers of research awaiting in languages and regions other than Spanish, French,

Portuguese, and English, and in smaller regional or institutional archives like that of the Royal Geographic Society where Schlez found the Parish Report.

Another characteristic shared by these six books is their focus on demographic groups that are harder to access and integrate into the version of the independence story that focuses on heroic battles or larger scale upheavals. By looking at the role of minor functionaries, imperial government bureaucrats, and the horizontal actions of non-lettered, municipal citizenry, we are granted access to worldviews and goals that are often quite distinct from those for whom buildings and streets get named and biographies written. For example, the work of ministerial staff is paradoxically both visible and invisible; they write letters, collate information, present documentation, keep records, and mediate between their superiors and the outside world. Their activities shape agendas and direct the flow of information, yet we know little about them as individuals. Mariano Schlez gives us a detailed exposition of the family background, financial interests, social ambition, and personal intellectual curiosities of Woodbine Parish, scion of a prominent London merchant family that quickly established a presence in the Río de la Plata area (his cousins were William and John Parish Robertson, who were active in Paraguay under Francia). Parish was an Eton man with close, lifelong connections to Castlereagh all of which led him to be, as Schlez clearly shows, a professional civil servant, dedicated to fact checking and providing the best information he could in order to advance British interests in a rapidly-changing environment (65–66). Similarly, Martínez-Flenor's Austrian diplomats also received their formation in a similar elite preparatory school, in that case the Academia Teresiana, later known as the Collegium Teresianum and the Academia Imperial (33). In both cases, this particular demographic was part of the newly professionalizing middle class, employed in the (informal) imperial project, but not necessarily deriving generational wealth from their direct access.

Taken together as a group, these books make it apparent that informal empire and independent nation-states clearly based themselves upon strong informational groundwork. Diplomatic reports, collated and distilled, provided decision-makers with factual observations about resource locations and quantities, military preparedness, political alliances, and the fickleness of public opinion. Von Germeten's lantern carriers and night guards also trafficked in information and used their position as mediators between the governors and the governed both to interpret and protect the actions of the plebeian and racialized classes whose behavior on the streets threatened disorder. These patrolmen were themselves workers who typically worked alone; therefore, they had considerable leeway to grant leniency, to overlook certain types of crimes, or make their own judgement calls about what needed to be reported and at what



level of detail. Supervisors further sanitized the information by compiling anonymous statistics drawn from the reports that would be sent upward to higher echelons of the viceregal governing apparatus. Von Germeten says that in doing so, these men were not trying to be judges themselves or to favor their friends and neighbors; rather they used “their in-depth understanding of a situation to balance tolerance and retribution” (20). Bowen-Silva also focuses on the plebeian city, a place where sellers, servants, children, and passersby collected and shared information about people, events, and opinions outside official channels and control (40). He recognizes vast (and often ephemeral) nonprint sources of information like displays of coats-of-arms, banners, material objects, street performances, and patriotic or royalist colors to signal one’s loyalties, a process he calls visualization and propagation (3). Bowen-Silva cites the example of Dolores Reyes who wore a brooch bearing Fernando VII’s portrait when she paid a visit to the mother of patriot commander Bernardo O’Higgins in the tense year of 1814, as royalist armies were gaining the advantage. In both Mexico City and Santiago de Chile, this revolution in communication “impacted the very nature and shape of that world between people” (2). These authors remind us that print culture captured only part of the information matrix that was creating new worldviews.

Of course, worldviews before, during, and after wartime were also shaped by more conventional means like the periodical press, *bandos*, pamphlets, sermons, official proclamations, and an increasingly active genre of literature for secular entertainment. In Rodrigo Escribano Roca’s book, national meaning-making took place through an “imperial mirror,” as politicians, priests, *periodistas*, and purveyors of fashionable taste looked backward in time for lessons and/or to shore up claims to legitimacy. Interestingly, the language and epistemological framework of the politics in print reveal strong fatalistic or apocalyptic tones: fatal doctrines, falls and redemptions, providential punishment, corruption, savagery, and barbarism. Escribano Roca reminds us that Spanish America was very much at the center of debates in Europe over culture, political structures, and economic organization. Karl Marx famously held Simón Bolívar in contempt as a sort of cut-rate Bonaparte, and Thomas Carlyle studied the example of Dr. Francia in Paraguay for clues about the way constitutional order could devolve into tyranny surprisingly quickly. Griffin’s work also casts its rhetoric in eschatological terms, with the author declaring he aimed to write not a blow-by-blow history, but rather a synopsis—“meaning this term in the way a scholar of the New Testament would use it”—“viewing the whole and the parts that animate it simultaneously” (8). Suggesting that the American Revolution may have ended only after the Civil War in 1865, he invokes fiery proto-sermons like Frederick Douglass’s powerful line, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” Both Escribano Roca and Griffin devote significant

attention to the elites' preoccupation with race revolt, miscegenation among the populace, and attempts to reconcile political liberalism with the continued existence of slavery as an institution in the decades after Spanish American independence was supposedly achieved, hinting both that the era's ideals remained unfulfilled.

Another notable connection among these six books is the way they blur the chronology of the Spanish American independence movements and make clear just how connected events there were to goings-on half a world away. For example, Bowen-Silva begins his study in 1780 with the little-known conspiracy of two Frenchmen, Antonio Vergne and Antonio Gramusset, who joined with a local Chilean lawyer, Mariano Pérez de Saravia, in a plot not just for political independence from Spain, but also for social transformation including the abolition of African slavery and the slave trade, respect for Indigenous peoples including land and tribute reform, the smashing of social hierarchies, and expanded public roles for women (12–13). He closes out the independence period in 1833 with the advent of the authoritarian regime of Diego Portales that put an end to fifty years of experimentation. In contrast, Escribano Roca starts his analysis of the impact of Spanish American independence on the political cultures of Spain and England in 1824, the year the military battle mainly had been won and notes that it continued as a central theme of concern, entertainment, and edification well into the 1850s. Griffin takes the most expansive view of the coming and going of revolution. He offers a synopsis of the entirety of the Atlantic Revolutions. For him, the process obviously began with upheavals in the Thirteen Colonies in the 1770s and moves through the expected series of interconnected transformations in France, Haiti, Spanish America, and the Caribbean; what is perhaps less expected, is that Griffin's final chapter includes a discussion of post-independence, nation-building efforts to stitch together the national fabric that continued well into the twentieth century, events like the erection of public monuments to Wellington and Daniel O'Connell, the nomination of Henri Christophe's Citadelle and Palais de San Souci to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1982, and Cuban Communists' conscription of the figure of Carlota, an enslaved woman who led resistance in the Matanzas Rebellion in 1843, into iconography of their movement.

When considered together, these six books demonstrate emerging directions in the study of Spanish American independence and, by extension, throughout the Atlantic world during the era of the great revolutions. First, they de-center the influence of Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Iberian Peninsula, and they invite us to consider the existence of a multipolar world in which other people, operating in other languages and in other political systems



(Hanseatic city states, Swiss cantons) and other revolutionary traditions (Irish rebels, Russian Decembrists) suggested alternative options. Second, these authors all reveal the multimodal way that knowledge was created and circulated. They study government bureaucrats' reports, diplomatic dispatches, the popular press, visual culture and symbolic language, radical workers' calls-to-arms, and the fripperies of polite ladies' albums. All of these communicated information and created boundaries of belonging among in- and out-groups. The six authors remind us that independence connotes something far broader than merely signing a declaration or winning a war, it implies a renegotiation of the way individuals and collectivities view how the world works, what are their new rights and responsibilities, and ultimately how they want to relate to each other.

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