

Week 3: “Popular democracy” and “conservative liberalism”: the practice of politics in the nineteenth century

Welcome back to our last lecture in our nineteenth-century block of lectures and seminars. From next week, we'll start to move into the C20.

This lecture will inevitably cover some of the ground that we started thinking about in both weeks 1 and 2, in which we thought first about elite representations of the nation after independence, and second about the question of slavery;

but I hope it will clarify and extend our discussions in three key ways (and divided into three parts)...

Today's lecture

- **First**, I want to give a broad overview of Latin American political “themes and problems,” if you like, from independence up until the late C19: how should the region's nations be governed? where do the different approaches to governance come from? And crucially, what are their implications for the **very different groups in the social and racial hierarchies that still very much define the region** after independence?
- **Second**: like we said that we would do in week 1, I want to turn away, at least initially, from the elite, top-down focus on state-building, and think about how **popular sectors/ non-elites** thought about **politics**.
- This view of politics as made from **BELOW** as well as from above is very characteristic of recent historiography on the C19, statebuilding, post-independence. It's often referred to as the idea of **“popular democracy”**.
- **Third**: In conversation with **BOTH** weeks 1, 2, and 3 together, I want to think about **how, overall, the arc of political thinking develops over the C19**. In this regard I particularly want to focus on a concept we keep coming back to and I keep inviting you to talk about in seminars but we haven't really done so yet (perhaps because it can seem quite confusing):
- **This is LIBERALISM**. Develops differently in ideology and practice across the region, but it clearly **EVOLVES, in conversation with developments “from above” as well as “from below”, and looks DIFFERENT** by the end of the century than it does at the start: it becomes in many places a new variant, a **“conservative liberalism,”** to take up a term used by **Rosie**.
- **I will turn finally to C19 Brazil**, as a case study here: In many ways Brazil looks different, but actually there are also many **similarities** with broad developments in other parts of the region.

Section 1: The post-independence context, c.1820s-1850s:

- We've said before: independence from Spain/Portugal has been achieved for most of mainland Latin America by the early 1820s;
- This was partly built on Enlightenment-derived, broadly "liberal" ideas about **political sovereignty, individual freedoms**, and so on.
- but what happens next is an open question:
- **"nationhood"** has to be built, and is a **POLITICAL** project, responds to deliberate processes and power dynamics, as we saw in wk 1;
- Lat Am has: enormous territories and relatively small populations;
- It also has **very firmly-entrenched social/ racial hierarchies, despite the building of important alliances between elite and popular groups** during the independence process. The problem of hierarchy, of who is in and who is out of the new nations, would be one lens I think through which can see the political struggles of the C19.

Economic and social context

- Two further features that will have implications for the way politics is conducted in the region are:
- **very low literacy levels, across whole region;**
- and:
- **Low level of urbanisation and not much industrialisation.** This means that most non-elite, poor groups are **RURAL**, peasants or (former) slaves; we're not talking about urban, working-class groups (although urbanisation does happen significantly in some countries by the later decades of the century – Brazil, Argentina, Chile...)
- So if we are thinking about **popular politics**, the **KIND** of non-elite groups you are dealing with matters in various key ways.
- **A further part of the political context is:**
- **Economic difficulties, which persist in most Lat Am countries until the end of the C19, although some manage to overcome them.**
- **Average annual economic growth (the amount the total economy grows per year) remained very low in Lat Am from 1800 to 1860: between 0.1% and 1%.**
- **Instability:** Politically, the new nations-in-formation are very **hard to govern:**
- **So, numerous border disputes, indigenous revolts, caste wars, banditry;**
- So you could also, reasonably, read a lot of the dynamics of the elite in the C19 as a **turn away from the kinds of liberal theories that allow these territories to break away from Spain, and towards the kind of thinking that allows for stable, peaceful government and economic development.**

And these kinds of goals sound excellent and desirable when you put them like this...

But remember **I am mostly describing this through elite eyes! All these terms – stability, governance – look very different if you are not a member of the elite.**

Slide: But who benefits from “stability” and prosperity”?

- For example, **the massive process of the privatisation of land capitalization of land** that happens in the second half of the century in particular: **looks very different from a non-elite point of view:**
- It involves the **EXPROPRIATION OF LANDS THAT WERE COMMUNALLY-HELD:** such as the *ejidos* that you’ll read about in the piece by James Sanders on Colombia for this week.
- Under the Spanish, in fact, **there were some communal “protections” for the indigenous communities that are ERODED in the quest to make lands more profitable;**
- Similarly there’s a process all over the region whereby landholders **expropriate (with significant help from governments) lands preventing peasants from being small landholders, and turning them into dependent wage-labourers on vast landed estates.**
- This looks great if you are a Brazilian coffee farmer in the province of São Paulo in the south-east [**image**] or a henequén farmer in Yucatán, Mexico [**image**]. You get a cheap, easy source of labourers to harvest your product; you don’t need to pay decent wages because people have no land to turn to that they could live off instead of working for you; your government, made up of people like you, reaps the rewards of the revenues you generate by exporting your product on the Atlantic market, to North America or northern Europe, and the industrialised goods that come from that go to buoy up urbanising, “civilizing,” modernising projects that benefit other members of the elite.
- It doesn’t look so good if you are a former slave in Brazil, who has no access to land, is in this relationship of neo-slavery with former slave masters, or an indigenous peasant in Yucatán who has just been kicked off your communally-farmed *ejido*.

And so **there is always this tension of elite and popular claims, goals, definitions of citizenship;** it helps explain the **hardening of elite attitudes towards who is ‘in’ and ‘out’ of the new nations:**

- For example: [**slide**] think back to Rebecca’s article in which, for example, José de San Martín, the “liberator” of Peru (along with Argentina and Chile)

in the wars of independence, thought about Peru's conquest by the Spanish in two very different ways at different points after independence.

- In 1822, he described Pizarro's flag as "the standard that Pizarro carried to enslave the Inca Empire";
- But by 1844, this same person saw Pizarro's legacy very differently: that same flag was now "the standard that the brave Don Francisco Pizarro carried during the conquest of Peru".

It gets even more complicated, because just as you have these tensions broadly between elites and non-elites about governance and governability after independence, you also don't have agreement AMONG the powerful elite sectors (or indeed, among the popular ones!)

And these different views about how elites can govern EACH OTHER, as well as what, if anything, the role of the masses will be, also help to produce some of the tensions that play out over the century:

Civilization and Barbarism. [see the lecture slide for the table].

And: we should note that if you're *not* a member of the elite, then exactly what side you might choose to ally with on this table depends quite a lot on your circumstances.

You might want the kind of constitutional citizenship promised by things like voting;

Or, you might want to hang on to your communally-owned land, under threat from the encroachments of a "modernising" state.

The same is true of one of the other big rifts in terms of political thinking in the century:

Centralism versus federalism. [see the lecture slide for the table.]

Part 2

Section 2: Popular Democracy

Slide: popular democracy

Recently, historiography has developed a new emphasis on the ways in which POPULAR SECTORS of different kinds HELPED SHAPE, RESPONDED TO, WERE PART OF, the process of "doing politics."

This means that political history is not just the history of the elite. It can't be understood without thinking about the political aims, and intentions, of popular sectors – and the way that they helped to shape elite thinking and priorities.

Who are these “popular” groups?

- We know enough about Latin America in the C19 by now to know that when we talk about **non-elite sectors**, we are talking about a variety of racial/ social categories of people, who don't necessarily think the same way about things across time/ place...
- Indigenous and mestizo (mixed) people
- Freed, afro-descendant people
- Enslaved people
- But also, within “popular” sectors we might include poor, white (or “white”) people

The idea of “popular democracy” means...

- non-elites are not just behaving **REACTIVELY**, i.e. just acting on specific local issues like taxation, land struggles, or religious issues;
- they are not just in thrall to powerful *caudillos* (the regional strongmen Rosie talked about) or to *coronéis*, (the local “bosses” or patrons that emerged in Brazilian case)
- even when there are not yet full mechanisms that we now associate with the practice of “democracy,” like voting, if we look through this lens we are likely to see ways in which non-elite, often illiterate people, **claimed citizenship and influenced party politics.**

This provides a new lens through which to see the popular components of the **unrest, violence, civil wars (sometimes called “caste wars”)** that unfold in the C19.

For example: Peter Guardino, writing in *HAHR*, 1995 (on Further Reading list this week):

- **writing about the significant peasant violence that erupts, and continues to flare, in MEXICO, in Guerrero, in 1820s to 1840s:**
- discusses an elite writer (Nicolás Bravo) who thought that: **“Indian peasants’ ignorance and passionate hatred of their betters disqualified them from participation in Mexican politics”**
- Mexico’s elite are **“haunted by images of race or ‘caste’ warfare formed first by the Haitian War of Independence and later by Hidalgo’s armies in Mexico itself”** [this refers to the campaigns of priest and rebel

leader Miguel Hidalgo, during the independence of Mexico, who gained a very broad-based popular following because he focused on issue that mattered to non-elites, including promising the abolition of slavery - **image**

- But: “**in contrast, the rebels themselves framed their goals in the same constitutional language that defined the national politics of Mexico’s literate upper classes.**”
- Rebels proclaim: “**We understand that our liberty lies in law... The people’s sovereignty asks that republican law rule, not whims.**”

Second example: from the reading you’ll have hopefully done for class, comes from the Cauca, south-west Colombia:

- Area of high Afro-Colombian population: free but also, until 1850s, enslaved people; so a different context from Guardino, but the frame of analysis is similar
- Afro-Colombians make key demands about **land, slavery, taxation;**
- They do this through **party politics: by influencing and being key members of the Liberal Party at the local level.**
- Liberal Party on national scene is controlled by powerful, white, elite men...
- Yet, locally at least, “**Afro-Colombians and other lower-class people transformed elite political organisations (the Liberal Party” into ‘their’ party.**”
- Far from being somehow exploited by the party for votes, or for help in the frequent bouts of WARFARE locally, **Afro-Colombians are better understood as being a specific and quite powerful CONTITUENCY.**

And there are other, repeated, clashes between elite and popular notions of citizenship, that unfold throughout the century.

Partly as a result of these tensions, and partly as a result of other processes, we can broadly think about the second half of the century as being a turn towards the more “conservative” form of liberalism that Rosie mentioned in her lecture. **For the last part of my lecture today I want to turn to this “conservative” liberalism, which becomes dominant from about mid-century, before turning to the example of Brazil.**

Part 3:

Section 3: “Conservative” liberalism in the second half of the century: a contradiction in terms?

Let's think quickly about what the economic and social context is for this change that appears from about mid-century (depending a lot on the country in question):

1850s on: 'modernisation'?

- Latin American countries are pulled into trade relationship with Europe (especially Britain; british economic influence in Lat Am has been called an "informal empire")
- European (especially British) demand for:
- **goods** (raw materials for industry/food for cities)
- **markets** for manufactures

Associated with this, we get:

- concentration of land in fewer hands >
- - massive loss of traditional Indian land
- - growth of *latifundios*
- wage labour and marginalisation of former peasants
- early urbanisation. (e.g. Rio de Janeiro has **275,000** inhabitants by 1872)
New urban elite/ middle class/ small proletariat
- **immigration** (in some countries much more than others – Brazil, and especially Argentina)

This is part of the context for the new more "conservative" liberalism.

Before we talk about this, let's talk quickly about what we actually mean by this term Liberalism that we keep using!

Liberalism in Latin America

- "liberalism" in C19 Latin America meant different things to different people, and changed over time.
- It's important to think of it as more than just a political label, adopted by ambitious caudillos, for example.
- It generally offers a different VISION of government than the Catholic monarchy did;
- It offers, at least in theory, ideas about individual freedoms, secularism, capable of transforming structures of Lat Am society:
- Liberalism has at least the potential for democratic change. e.g. **liberals generally attack SLAVERY...**

- **This is especially the case with the Church: liberals enact ANTICLERICAL measures when they get into power in Lat Am.**
- In the wars of independence, it was used as a justification to alter Latin American forms of rule away from monarchism and colonial rule and for independence. But: what else might liberalism “do”? What about the **growing ‘claims’ made on liberal ideas from ‘below’ – like those Afro-Colombians in the Cauca? What do elites do with that?**
- Does liberalism include democracy? What about universal suffrage? What about economic and social forms of equality, as well as the formal abolition of slavery or the granting of basic political freedoms?

A conservative turn:

- **A new generation of Liberals, around mid-century:** many urban professionals, some of mixed race; haven’t known Catholic monarchy; enthused by **European revolutions of 1848. Generations of 1840 and 1850 become the “great” builders of the liberal order in Lat Am in 2nd half of C19:** Asociación de Mayo in Argentina, incl future statesmen e.g. Bartolomé Mitre, Domingo Sarmiento, Juan Bautista Alberdi; in Mexico, Benito Juárez and the Lerma de Tejada brothers, who **become architects of *La Reforma***; or anti-slavery/ republican movements in Brazil.
- But many of these are also the same people who advocate or support things like:
 - The “**conquest of the desert**” in Argentina and the massacre of indigenous peoples; similar with the Mapuche in Chile;
 - The **NARROWING of suffrage rights** in some places. **in Colombia, a new party called the Independent Party is formed by a breakaway element of the Liberal party. In 1886, under the influence of this new party, a property qualification is re-introduced** when, in the 1850s, universal male suffrage had been enacted.

And turning to Brazil, as we said we’d do in the last part of this lecture, is a good way to think in more detail about the particular form that this conservative turn took there:

Slide: conservative liberalism in Brazil

- In Brazil (1881) a Liberal government enacts a reform that, by introducing a LITERACY qualification to a largely illiterate country, **reduces the suffrage from about 50% of free adult men, which was about 10% of**

the total population, to less than 1% of the total population; from over a million voters, to 150,000.

- In Brazil, in particular, you get the rise of a set of ideas called **positivism** (derived from the ideas of a European thinker called August Comte), which is best seen as a specific kind of “conservative liberalism.”
- Positivism elevates the idea of “**progress**” (economic, technical, “social”, and racial) to new heights.
- But, it combines “progress” with the idea of “**order.**” It does NOT espouse full democracy, rather thinks that an enlightened sector of the elite should take charge of “modernising” everyone else.
- And it’s THIS generation that is ascendant when slavery is abolished in 1888 and which is an important part of a peaceful, elite/ army-led coup in the following year that gets rid of Brazil’s royal family;

The positivist slogan is “Order and Progress”; still on Brazil’s **flag** today.

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Here is a useful reference on Brazilian positivism, v readable, if you are interested:

Todd Diacon, *Stringing Together a Nation: Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon and the Construction of Modern Brazil, 1906-1930* (Duke University Press, 2004) Introduction & chapter 4 (we have these scanned at the library; we can get you access if you don’t have it)

“Scientific” racism:

- Fully-ascendant “**scientific**” racism (confusingly, many of the same people who advocate the abolition of slavery are themselves influenced strongly by “scientific” racist ideas).
- Whiteness is equated with social and economic progress; “whitening” remains the aim until the 1930s; embarrassment/ confusion about how to deal with Brazil’s history of race mixture.
- Look at this quotation by a Brazilian Liberal in 1880:
- “...future victory in the life struggle among us will belong to the white. ... the white type will continue to predominate by natural selection until it emerges pure and beautiful as in the old world... when it has totally acclimatized on this continent. Two factors will contribute to

this process: on the one hand the abolition of the slave trade and the continuous disappearance of the Indians, and on the other hand European immigration!”

This era is also associated with, for example, urban reforms in the capital, Rio de Janeiro, create lovely roomy boulevards, modelled on Paris, for the elite, or impressive municipal buildings like this municipal theatre; yet **poor housing is often destroyed in order to do this,** and the poor remain housed in the **slums and early favelas (hillside shantytowns)** that you can see in these images.

- **Meanwhile, more and more, influenced by the “popular democracy” ideas that have been developed by historians in other parts of Latin America, Brazilian historians are tracing a similar story for Brazil.**
- Our 2 readings for the seminar help us get into this: one on Colombia, written in the early 2000s, and the other on Brazil, a decade or so earlier: so we have a contrast of places under consideration, but also changing historiographical interpretations of the practice of “doing” politics.