An Age of Imperial Revolutions

JEREMY ADELMAN

WHEN THE VENEZUELAN CREOLE FRANCISCO DE MIRANDA led an expeditionary force to the shores of his native land to liberate it from Spanish rule in the summer of 1806, he brought with him a new weapon for making revolutions: a printing press. He hoped that his band of white, black, and mulatto patriots would start a revolt to free a continent with an alliance of swords and ideas. After dawdling for ten days, Miranda learned that royal troops (also white, black, and mulatto) were marching from Caracas. He withdrew before the two multiracial forces could clash. Consider Miranda's reasons for retreat: The nation he sought to free from its chains was not, in his opinion, a nation at all. While Venezuelans yearned for "Civil Liberty," they did not know how to grasp and protect it. They needed a liberation that would tutor them in the ways of liberty and fraternity, to create a nation of virtuous citizens out of a colony of subjects. This was why Miranda treated the printing press, a portable factory of words about liberty and sovereignty, as part of the arsenal of change: he wanted to create public opinion where there was none. But faced with the prospect of a violent clash and a scourge of "opposition and internal divisions," of a war waged mainly with swords, he preferred to pull out and bide his time.[1]

Miranda's dilemma—whether or not to move forward knowing how revolutions worked in imperial settings when their protagonists did not presume that their cause was self-evidently bound to triumph—evokes questions about the embedded politics of what we might now call, with a wince, "regime change." As empires gave way to successor systems in their colonies, those regimes began to call themselves nations not in order to cause imperial crises, but as the result of such crises. The study of imperial crises and the study of the origins of nationalism in colonial societies should inform each other more than they do. Bringing these two separate fields of scholarship together, and questioning the tacit and not-so-tacit beliefs upon which they rest, can help us reframe the complex passages from empires to successor states, free

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[1] Archivo General de Indias (Seville) [hereafter AGI], Gobierno, Caracas, Legajo 458, September 13, 1806, Manuel de Guevara Vasconcelos to Principe de la Paz; September 5, 1806, Francisco Cavallero Sarmiento to Principe de la Plaz; Estado/Caracas, 71/9, November 8, 1808, "Informe de Secretaría á S.M. sobre el asunto de Miranda"; Francisco de Miranda, "Todo pende de nuestra voluntad," in Miranda, *América espera* (Caracas, 1982), 356; Karen Racine, *Francisco de Miranda: A Transatlantic Life in the Age of Revolution* (Wilmington, Del., 2003).

from some of the teleologies of decline and triumph.[2] First, presumptions about the inevitability of imperial decline in the "age of revolutions" have cast the tensions and upheavals of the period as a sign of the sclerosis and demise of transatlantic systems, when they might better be thought of as responses to imperial adaptations. There was little that was inevitable about imperial demise. Second, revolutions were imperial in nature; that is to say, they were part of empire-wide transformations in that they yielded new social practices in defining the internal life of sovereign politics, as efforts to put empires, and their parts, on a different footing in order to confront external pressures. Revolutions did not begin as secessionist episodes; "nations" emerged as products of tensions wrought by efforts to recast the institutional framework of imperial sovereignty.

These arguments suggest a different approach to the axial shift from Atlantic empires to nation-states. They raise the prospect of altered historical sequelae, the possibility of inversions and backslidings, historic starts that went nowhere and others that never caught on despite the efforts to impose national conventions and structures on them. If the nation-state is not considered the automatic post-cursor to empire, the variety of routes, including a host of "might-have-beens," needs to be restored to the narrative about the age of revolutions. Indeed, for many corners of the Atlantic world, what emerged from imperial revolutions was not the antithesis to empire, but the revitalization of the notion of empire itself; to many contemporaries, the nation did not necessarily define itself in opposition to empire. There was a sense of the politics of imperial revolutions, their "chain of disequilibria," which was more important than the cohering nationalist drive to bring an end to empire. In the age of imperial revolutions, events and their meanings were not so easily compressed into a notion of historical time that yielded to the emergence, if not triumph, of nations.[3]

THE FATE OF EMPIRES AND THE MAKING OF NATIONS in the age of revolutions were central to the field of "Atlantic history" from the very start of its own formation as a field of scholarship seeking to transcend idiographic, nationally bound narratives about the rise of the "West." When R. R. Palmer composed his classic two-volume *The Age of Democratic Revolution* about the forty-year epic culminating in Napoleon's defeat, he argued that these upheavals were essentially democratic, which he defined as signifying "a new feeling or kind of equality, or at least a discomfort with older forms of social stratification and formal rank." The transformation was sweeping enough for Palmer to range from Poland to Pernambuco while rendering these changes in the singular, as a transformation in the makeup of the Atlantic world driven by an overreaching logic. Here was a "movement" against the possession of government by enclosed cliques of privileged men, an oceanic uprising of democrats against aristocrats. Palmer sought to transcend entrenched, exceptionalist, national narratives; for good reason, he is seen as one of the founders of Atlantic history. Now

[2] An important intervention is Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, Calif., 2005), esp. 156–157.

[3] On the notion of inverted sequences, see Albert O. Hirschman, *The Strategy of Economic Development* (New Haven, Conn., 1958), esp. chap. 4 and the discussion of the "chain of disequilibria."

that the Cold War is over, Palmer has been recovered for a post-nationalist, post-socialist turn in history—transnational, Atlantic, global, or worldwide in scale, in keeping with the temper of the times, which sees the spread of liberal democracy as the dominant tidal process.[4]

Yet Palmer's efforts to plot a narrative that escaped the fastened grip of national destinies, to evoke the age of revolutions as more than just the expression of the unique insight of "founders" or *philosophes*, relied on unquestioned assumptions about nationhood: that it was the sequel to empire once the force of democracy erupted onto the stage. Nationhood was the evolved form, the only form, in which democracy could realize itself, because nations were the peerless bounded units in which co-members could acknowledge the equal rights of others, which lay at the theoretical core of democracy, liberalism, and the kind of civic nationalism that Palmer and others extolled.[5] The assumptions about nationhood had a corollary about the *anciens régimes* they replaced: these were aristocratic monarchies whose legitimacies had dwindled because their moral foundations lost ground to intellectual and social changes. Less important to the epic was the imperial state. One is tempted to conclude that Palmer was less interested in the state, because his argument was so dependent on seeing the nation as the sequel to realize democratic forces where autocracy once ruled that he did not consider the problem of sovereignty, whether imperial or national, to be worth much ink-spilling. His narrative of the French Revolution skips the colonies, mercantilism, and slavery. The spread of abolitionism and the assault on the slave trade are spectral, and the inter-imperial conflict that ignited the fiscal crises of the regimes was imperceptible to the analysis except as background.

Almost a half-century later, our perspective on Atlantic empires looks very different. It would be hard to imagine how one would narrate their stories without placing the slave trade, slave labor, and the explosive struggles for emancipation at the center. By the same token, the work on early nationalism has revealed just how "constructed" and labored it was. The very turn to Atlantic history that Palmer sought to motivate has exposed some older presumptions about imperial arrangements that thrived on legalized systems of privilege and legitimated regimes of inequality.[6] Up to a point. David Armitage's suggestive outline of three approaches to Atlantic history (cirum-, trans-, and cis-Atlantic formulations) transcends particular national boundaries—but he admits that most of what might fall into each of these domains has been bound by particular legal or linguistic contours. In an *AHR*

[4] R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1959), 1: 4; Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 24–30. For a neo-Palmerian take, see Lester D. Langley, *The Americas in the Age of Revolution, 1750–1850* (New Haven, Conn., 1996).

[5] This, of course, created a problem for liberals who wanted theirs to be a universal creed to transcend history, culture, and race, to be the ideology of a concert of interest-swapping nations, giving rise to an imperial liberalism that could cover its own exclusionary tracks by making judgments about the conditions for people to enjoy rights. See Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study of Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, 1999).

[6] Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* (London, 1988); Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004). Some may argue that privilege and inequality were not unique to emporia, and reproduced themselves within nations. The argument here is simply that empires defined legal hierarchies in spatial terms in ways that nations did not.

Forum in 2000 titled "Revolutions in the Americas," separate empires were the subject of discrete articles, and the synthesis by Jaime Rodríguez O. emphasized the degree to which each exemplified how empires were sundered by civil wars within them, not conflagrations between them. This argument toppled the longstanding view that colonists were nation-builders in waiting, but it did less to reconsider the larger imperial context in which state sovereignty was made—and unmade.[7] There have been notable exceptions to this view: Fred Anderson's *Crucible of War* locates the struggle of the Seven Years' War in British North America within a broader global clash that tied the fate of the Hudson Valley to Manila and Madras, not to mention Montreal. Exploring more closely the "American" Revolution, Alan Taylor examines the struggle from various positions "beyond the line"—indigenous and infra-colonial (so that French and loyalist colonists, among others, appear as more than afterthoughts in the saga). David P. Geggus and others have tracked the virus of slave insurrection beyond Saint-Domingue after 1791.[8] On an even broader scale, John H. Elliott's *Empires of the Atlantic World* is a notable study of how competing empires also looked chronically at each other. More than two decades ago, Peggy Liss compared what she called "Atlantic revolutions." For the most part, however, American, French, and even Iberian revolutions have been narrated as the product of autonomous impulses unfolding within their borders, as basic rigidities of sprawling and overextended regimes that gave way to insurrections that toppled them, most especially in the inaugural upheaval of 1776, whose historiography stamped so much of how we have come to understand empires, revolutions, and nationhood.[9]

One reason that nationally bound narratives of emerging statehood still prevail is the recurring ways in which imperial fates are told. The fact is, most histories of empires have tended to dwell on their rise and capabilities, and less on their demise or crises—in part because empires have tended to be seen as fated to conform to inevitable laws of motion.[10] When Edward Gibbon published *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in 1776 (and how much he worried about Ireland and America is a matter of some speculation), he wound down chapter 49 by observing how empires violated basic natural laws: "There is nothing perhaps more adverse to nature and reason than to hold in obedience remote countries and foreign nations, in opposition to their inclination and interest."[11] In this spirit, historians and social scientists have sought to inscribe narratives of adventurous rise and eventual

[7] David Armitage, "The Concepts of Atlantic History," in Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (London, 2002), 15–24; Jack P. Green, "The American Revolution," *American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (February 2000): 93–102; Franklin W. Knight, "The Haitian Revolution," ibid., 103–115; Virginia Guedea, "The Process of Mexican Independence," ibid., 116–130; Jaime E. Rodríguez O., "The Emancipation of America," ibid., 131–153. There is little inter-visibility between these case studies.

[8] Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (New York, 2000); Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderlands of the American Revolution* (New York, 2006); David P. Geggus, ed., *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia, S.C., 2001).

[9] John H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven, Conn., 2006); Peggy K. Liss, *Atlantic Empires: The Network of Trade and Revolution, 1713–1826* (Baltimore, 1983).

[10] This is most intriguingly argued by Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006).

[11] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York, 2000), xxvii as cited in introduction by David Womersley.

fall, to be followed by successors. There is a resilient convention of telling stories about imperial decline as inevitably dictated by the form in which imperial sovereignty took, as metropoles ruling oppressed "others." If there is an imperial demise, it is inscribed in the ways these "others" resist, rebel, and defect, reducing empires to metropoles that then—albeit reluctantly—refashion themselves as nations like their offspring.[12]

WHAT REMAINS UNCLEAR IS *HOW* TO CONNECT histories of empires and nations once they are not bound by basic internal logics. These struggles unfolded in particular institutional settings—colonies as parts of empires that assembled the components of eighteenth-century notions of sovereignty. What distinguished empires was not their absolute definitions of sovereignty, but, as Lauren Benton has shown in her study of legal pluralism across a variety of colonial contexts, their amalgamation of a variety of institutional practices and their incomplete territorial contours.[13] Resetting the notion of sovereignty from a view that rests on self-evident principles of rulership, especially as regimes sprawled overseas, into one that constituted an unstable and shifting assortment of understandings and practices alters the relationship between empire and territory. It has been a commonplace to identify bounded territorial spaces with sovereignty, and therefore the nation-state with the lines that demarcated rightless from rightful subjects. This is now changing, giving way to a view of sovereignty released from *the* bounded state, and recasting it as a bundle of claims, images, and assertions of authority that can be aggregated at more than one juridical level. This new view takes some distance from the anachronism of identifying national self-determination as the modern genesis of sovereignty, and restores an appreciation for the premodern roots of our transnational political vocabulary. As we contend with the challenges of globality, it may help to reconsider the pluralist foundations of our understandings of state authority, and their ties to the boundedness of geographically distinct polities—in effect, the multiple ways in which state power and state independence have been combined and recombined over time and the fundamental disequilibrium that lies at the core of sovereignty.[14]

[12] Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York, 1988); Alexander J. Motyl, *Imperial Ends: The Decay, Collapse, and Revival of Empires* (New York, 2001); David B. Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1415–1980* (New Haven, Conn., 2000). More generally, on how regimes ossify, see Mancur Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation, and Social Rigidities* (New Haven, Conn., 1982).

[13] Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400–1900* (New York, 2002); Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 197.

[14] Robert Jackson, *Sovereignty: The Evolution of an Idea* (Cambridge, 2007); James J. Sheehan, "The Problem of Sovereignty in European History," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 1 (February 2006): 1–15; Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton, N.J., 2006). Most work on sovereignty has been done by political scientists, mainly concerned with international relations. See Daniel Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton, N.J., 2001); and on sovereignty as resting on contradictory principles and practices, see Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *Problematic Sovereignty: Contested Rules and Political Possibilities* (New York, 2001). Christopher J. Bickerton, Philip Cunliffe, and Alexander Gourevitch, eds., *Politics without Sovereignty: A Critique of Contemporary International Relations* (London, 2007). On sovereignty and *imperium*, see Anthony Pagden, *Peoples and Empires: A Short History of European Migration, Exploration, and Conquest, from Greece to the Present* (New York, 2001), xvi–xxv.

The shifting identification of empire with territoriality set the context for the ways in which the meaning of sovereignty itself changed in the run up to—and as a cause of—revolution. Empires did not start out with ambitions of territorial indelibility. In the wake of the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), the pope-brokered arrangement that carved up the claims to new discoveries, the governments of Madrid and Lisbon embarked on a path of halting and incomplete—but nonetheless increasing—dominion, ruled by a king and embodied in laws that would prevail over his subjects in the form of deliverance of justice. Only with time did sovereignty become associated with territory. The same might be said when the later European claimants in the New World put down stakes: the outer boundaries of the governable hinterlands were never as clear as the mandate to bring laws to and enforce them against those under the monarch's reign. Empires spread European notions of sovereignty to distant shores with less concern for legal homogeneity up to the definable boundaries of empire. They were rather more polyglot and vague, exemplified by the prominence of gray zones that shaded the incomplete and contingent reach of empires—gray zones that would eventually evolve into borderlands. With the growing density of the imperial presence in the Americas, however, and for some areas of Africa, including the Bights and Angola, friction mounted where empires bumped up against each other; borderlands became bleeding grounds as the carnage between Europeans, Indians, Africans, and peoples "in between" intensified. In this sense, territoriality *acquired* increasing importance, and was grafted onto earlier notions of sovereignty associated with the juridical authority of the monarch.[15]

As a mechanism for state-building in Europe, empire was also deployed by the newcomers, Dutch, French, and English—who in similar fashion evolved from Atlantic foragers to actors in more integrated systems in Europe. By the eighteenth century, mercantilist empires were jockeying for supremacy from the St. Lawrence to the River Plate. Linda Colley's study of a "British" identity born out of a plurality of regional kingdoms makes it clear that global conflict with rival empires gave a metropolitan power a sense of itself as an entity united against (mainly Catholic and pope-loving) others. In the spiral of mercantilist wars, especially after the Treaties of Westphalia (1648) settled some of the basic boundary disputes in (Western) Europe, Old World states displaced their rivalries to conflict on the high seas or skirmishes over colonial borderlands—which redoubled the significance of territoriality, followed by the proliferation of efforts to define boundaries through treaties in the eighteenth century.[16]

The accent on territoriality intensified the disequilibrium and the outward expansion of European states. Empires had crises, but not because they could not adapt; it was not so much the refusal to change as change itself that yielded to the tensions of empire. By the middle of the eighteenth century, rulers and ministers were wrangling over how to adapt their ways and embark on increasingly ambitious

[15] Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): 814–841; for a view of territorializing sovereignty from one side, see Barbara E. Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago, 1996), and for another side, see Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, Calif., 1989).

[16] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (London, 2003), esp. chap. 8.

plans to modify the institutions, private and public, that held their emporia together. The efforts by Parliament to revamp the status of monopoly trading companies and transform the fiscal instruments of empire to connect the "parts" more directly in the service of the "whole" are well known to Anglo-American readers; to some extent, the same is true of the ministers and advisers of Paris's *ancien régime* who coined the very term "mercantilism" as a label for policies of imperial sovereignty. It was not by sheer coincidence that Madrid and Lisbon did the same. Variously described as the Bourbon (for Spain) or Pombaline (for Portugal) reforms, they had multiple means to pursue a broad objective: to reconstitute the empires so that private rents and public revenues flowed more effectively to support and defend the territorial contours of imperial states. Not all policies cohered. Some were more effective than others. And some were stopgaps dressed up as the brainchildren of a broad vision. But the commitment to reform cannot be denied. As Josep M. Fradera and John H. Elliott have argued, the examples of reform in Iberia were emulated by the British after the debacle of the 1770s precisely because they had been required to reform in order to catch up.[17]

Reform recombined important aspects of empires—and gave them enough stamina to suggest that predictions of their inevitable fall, and certainly their impossible adjustment, were at the very least premature. For the Iberians, the shifts were more dramatic because old ways were more deeply ingrained, but the contrasts are more in degree than in kind. Lumbering convoys were suspended in favor of licensing systems for trading ships. Viceregal habits ceded space to a multitude of new legal districts and officers, further pluralizing the spatial layers of public authority. Scarcely patrolled frontiers were militarized and fortifications built, and militias were trained, consisting of plebeian colonial populations, often free blacks and mulattos. Meanwhile, to pacify unruly gray zones, "treaties" were signed with Indian borderlanders, even by those powers such as Spain that were unaccustomed to this legal convention. Indeed, whole new practices of trading, gifting, and treating were devised—without entirely doing away with earlier ways of "reducing" Indians—to create networks of allies on the borderlands of empires, especially where those empires abutted rivals. The motivation for change was defensive, of course—a reaction and response to the compound pressures of rivalry with other empires and with each other. Each empire set about to delimit and defend the territorial reach of its domain, and within each to promote commerce, more investment in mining, settlement of frontiers, and the surge in traffic in African slaves to create a substratum of laborers upon whose shoulders the fate of empires would rest.[18]

Reconstituting the regimes provoked a riptide of opposition, less to the principles and more to the practices of new imperial sovereignty, both within the metropoles and more ominously in the colonies. From the 1760s, British colonists and their

[17] Josep M. Fradera, *Colonias para después de un imperio* (Barcelona, 2005); Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, esp. chaps. 10–11.

[18] David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven, Conn., 2005), chap. 5; John Fisher, *Commercial Relations between Spain and Spanish America in the Era of Free Trade, 1778–1796* (Liverpool, 1985); Jorge M. Pedreira, "From Growth to Collapse: Portugal, Brazil, and the Breakdown of the Old Colonial System (1760–1830)," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 80, no. 4 (2000): 839–864; Kenneth Maxwell, *Pombal: Paradox of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1995); Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Apogee of Empire: Spain and New Spain in the Age of Charles III, 1759–1789* (Baltimore, 2003).

commercial patrons in Britain bridled at the flurry of commercial and fiscal demands. But these were hardly unique. Pombal ran into resistance in Lisbon, which got fierce when his patron, King José I, died in 1777—leaving the minister exposed to his many detractors. In Madrid, bread riots brought an end to experiments in free grain trade. In the Americas, there was even more unrest. The Túpac Amaru revolt in the Central Andes, Comunero uprisings farther north, seditious activity across New Spain, and the aborted Tiradentes movement in Brazil, all exemplified the various ways in which colonial peoples saw the reforms as being effective enough to disturb tacit and not-so-tacit colonial pacts among peripheral rulers and between them and subaltern agents.[19]

Imperial sovereignty was not so narrowly confined that other roads to the same ends could not be devised—or stumbled upon. In many respects, the stalemate in the fiscal struggle has masked the ways in which empires nurtured other means to harness possessions to fuel their rivalries. As the eighteenth century unfolded, the French, British, and Iberian empires contrived measures to combine labor more thoroughly with natural resources. Inter-colonial, infra-imperial, and even inter-imperial trade boomed as indigenous peoples were inducted into the market for wares and workers. From the draft of Andeans into textile *obrajes* to the luring of Choctaws into a cycle of consumption and debt, expanded territoriality had its flip side in the deepened exploitation of native peoples. But where reforms to build new economic pillars of empire were most evident was in the harnessing of African supplies of labor with American demand, with merchant capital—increasingly based in New World ports from Baltimore to Buenos Aires—serving as the source of credit for this emboldened intercontinental integration. Throughout the "age of revolutions," and despite the scare of the secession of the thirteen colonies, the traffic in African captives rose, and did not fall. Indeed, it spiked *after* the insurrection spread across Saint-Domingue and in spite of the heightened abolitionist campaigning in Europe. Some of this was fueled by the buoyed output from silver mining in New Spain and the Andes, which disgorged more specie into circulation in the Atlantic world. Some was fueled by loosened restrictions on slave trading. The old *asiento* contract that regulated the slave trade to Spanish American ports was defunct, and by 1789 Madrid issued a series of decrees opening the slave trade to individual merchants. Similar deregulations lifted restrictions on Brazilian control over trade with Africa—so much so that Rio de Janeiro was becoming the hub for a South Atlantic circulation of commodities and specie from South American hinterlands for exchange along the African coast, and deep into Angola. Consider the following numbers: From 1781 to 1790, 754,000 Africans were imported to the Americas, of whom 319,000 were destined for Saint-Domingue, which meant that 434,000 were spread across the rest of the hemisphere. The following decade saw a dip to 687,000 captives shipped, but only 66,000 bound for Saint-Domingue (leaving 621,000 for the rest of the Americas to exploit). And from 1801 to 1810, no slaves went to Saint-Domingue, but 609,000

[19] Kenneth R. Maxwell, *Conflicts and Conspiracies: Brazil and Portugal, 1750–1808* (Cambridge, 1973), 23–28, 67–71; Anthony McFarlane, "Rebellions in Late Colonial Spanish America: A Comparative Perspective," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 14, no. 3 (1983): 313–338; Eric Van Young, "The Age of Paradox: Mexican Agriculture at the End of the Colonial Period, 1750–1810," in Nils Jacobsen and Hans-Jürgen Puhle, eds., *The Economies of Mexico and Peru during the Late Colonial Period, 1760–1810* (Berlin, 1986), 64–90.

went to the rest of the hemisphere. And after 1808, of course, United States ports dropped off as importers of Africans.[20] The result was an increasingly autonomous and lucrative business that expanded the pool of commercial rents into which imperial authorities could dip for revenues, and a powerful class of merchant capitalists in the colonies to whom monarchs and ministers could turn for loans and loyalties.[21]

Adaptation made the empires internally heterogeneous, while in some ways making them more externally alike. The challenge was to balance the diversity within empire with the fiscal hunger and need to direct funds to metropolitan governments locked in intractable conflicts with rivals.[22] It is true, the American Revolution and the spasm of insurrection down the Andean spine were wakeup calls. But these threats did not in any way diminish the affiliation of sovereignty with the defense of empire. If anything, they were opportunities to reconstitute relations between the parts of empires. While warfare issued its blows, it also presented opportunities. For the British, as P. J. Marshall has shown, the effort to extend sovereignty in the eighteenth century may have provoked colonial unrest in the thirteen colonies, but it consolidated a hold over Indian provinces and preserved its claims in the West Indies. "Territorial empire had survived and was quickly to resume its growth" in part because the pacts that rulers learned to make with colonial mediators were so effective at striking a compromise between the illusion of unequivocal imperial authority and an admixture of systems of sovereignty at the local and regional level. Needless to say, India would prove to be the fount for empire that British North America never was. In the same manner, global war did more to recast empire in Iberian domains than to sunder them. When the 1790s sucked Spain and Portugal into the maelstrom, both regimes faced spikes in defense costs, but adapted in ways that reintegrated the parts of empires around a new matrix of slavery, silver, and de-centered sovereignty. In a way, we see Iberian authorities at the time recalibrating colonial pacts in the same ways that the East India Company authorities renegotiated the alliances between the firm and its local mediating allies.[23]

[20] David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1987), 247.

[21] Jorge Gelman, *Campesinos y estancieros: Una región del Rio de la Plata a fines de la época colonial* (Buenos Aires, 1998). Once upon a time, this pattern reinforced the view of persistent feudality of Iberian America, that this double transformation was simply a veil over patrimonial property. Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln, Neb., 1988); Richard L. Garner, "Long-Term Silver Mining Trends in Spanish America: A Comparative Analysis of Peru and Mexico," *American Historical Review* 93, no. 4 (October 1988): 898–935; Matilde Souto Mantecón, *Mar abierto: La política y el comercio del consulado de Veracruz en el ocaso del sistema imperial* (México, 2001); Fisher, *Commercial Relations*, 61–77; John Fisher, *Trade, War, and Revolution: Exports from Spain to Spanish America, 1797–1820* (Liverpool, 1992), 54–62; Sheila de Castro Faria, *A colônia em movimento: Fortuna e família no cotidiano colonial* (Rio de Janeiro, 1998); Manolo Garcia Florentino, *Em costas negras: Uma história do tráfico atlântico de escravos entre a África e o Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro, 1993).

[22] As Carlos Sempat Assadourian has observed about an earlier conjuncture, it was possible to reconcile multiple pressures within the social and economic "spaces" of empire—and a juxtaposition of spatial responses within empires to the same conjuncture. Assadourian, *El sistema de la economía colonial: El mercado interior, regiones y espacio económico* (México, 1983), 15–16.

[23] P. J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America, c. 1750–1783* (New York, 2005), 5; Carlos Marichal, *La bancarrota del virreinato: Nueva España y las finanzas del imperio español, 1780–1810* (México, 1999); Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton, N.J., 2007), chap. 3.

All of this means that we must ask some basic questions about the alleged rigidity of empires, and therefore how foreordained were their successors as sovereignty was remade in the age of revolutions. If empires were not doomed, condemned to succumb to an iron law of "overstretch," or fated to fall victim to their own inelasticities, how are we to think about the crises that they *did* plunge into? One of the implications of the preceding summary is that we cannot point to increasingly outdated notions of sovereignty as the source of the problem, as if imperial sovereignty were contained within a mold out of which it could not change or adapt. Instead of a fossilized balance of archaic forces waiting to be overturned by more robust ones (a stock-in-trade account of revolution), a spoils-driven rivalry and feverish adaptation motivated the chain of disequilibrium that destabilized the global system. Indeed, frontier expansion, intensified reliance on coerced social relations to pump commodities through Atlantic trade networks, and more war were an (explosive) bonanza. The breakdowns did not occur as prophesied (by Gibbon and other figures of the Enlightenment), as first afflicting what were seen as the most backward of empires, the Iberians, because they could not accommodate new principles of enlightened freedom. It was the Spanish reformer Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos who observed that the breakup of the Spanish Empire was a civil war contained within and unleashed by a broader, global conflagration. It was the latter that begat the former, not just in the putatively backward and weakest of empires, but across all of their rivals.[24]

The 1790s were a turning point, in the sense that this decade accentuated prior developments while twisting imperial histories onto a new track from which it would become more difficult to deviate. With the outbreak of the French Revolution and the advent of total war, the cycle of conflict between empires ramped up. The French Republic did not divest itself of its colonies in the name of propagating freedoms; monarchy was challenged, but not empire. Instead, it clung to imperial ways, as slaves and free blacks in Saint-Domingue learned, and as autonomists in Guadeloupe also discovered, because Paris, for symbolic and material motives, could not imagine its centrality in a nation without an empire to embellish it. The difference about the "total war" after 1791 (to borrow an apt image of David Bell's to depict a fundamental change in the nature of organized armed conflict as an all-encompassing struggle of annihilation) was that victory was no longer limited to contested borderlands on the fringes, but extended to how regimes would be ruled at home and abroad. The future of monarchy itself, the colligative emblem of imperial sovereignty, was at stake, which ratcheted up the conflagration between rivals—and in turn folded the carnage between empires into a civil war within them. What Jovellanos observed of Spain could have been anticipated in the total war unleashed in the colony of Saint-Domingue.[25]

So interlocking were the rivalries that intensified competition could brook no bystanders. At first blush, Madrid and Lisbon sought to stay out of what seemed to be the continuation of an essentially Anglo-French contest. In fact, both courts

[24] Cited in José Alvarez Junco, *Mater Dolorosa: La idea de España en el siglo XIX* (Madrid, 2001), 120–121.

[25] Laurent Dubois, "The Promise of Revolution: Saint-Domingue and the Struggle for Autonomy in Guadelupe, 1797–1802," in Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution*, 112–133; David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare As We Know It* (Boston, 2007).

feuded over their allegiances, between pro-English and pro-French factions, a match that grew increasingly bitter as the revolutionary wars gave way to Napoleon's continental and Atlantic-wide ambitions. What Spain and Portugal had as their lifelines were outposts that could help compensate with rents and revenues to cover the costs of intensified rivalry over European and Atlantic supremacy. This was also, of course, their vulnerability when the sea-lanes were severed. Wartime adaptations had important effects on the internal balancing of empire and the relationship between its parts. Dependency on the fringes gave local brokers an important role in maintaining the delicate equipoise within empire that was being ravaged by disequilibrium between empires. Increasingly, the primary sites in the governance of colonial affairs were the merchant guilds and municipal councils. Viceroys and high courts still weighed in, but there was a notable devolution of power to the delegated authorities of colonial ruling blocs and their assemblies of local potentates. While much has been made of figures such as Mexico's Servando Teresa de Mier or even the adventurer Miranda as apostles of independence, colonial deliberations were dominated by loyalty to monarchy and empire, as exemplified by the concerned voices of José Ignacio de Pombo and José da Silva Lisboa.[26]

It is too simple to describe the age of revolutions as the by-product of internal and ineluctable crises of the *anciens régimes*, for within it lay opportunities to rearrange the practices of mercantilism and the terms of the exchanges between private magnates in colonies and monarchs in the metropoles—even, and perhaps especially, at the apex of the crises. Colonial loyalists advocated accelerated imperial adaptation and accommodation to new commercial realities (including more open trade) to contain the spread of political convulsion and slave unrest. This does not mean that such reforms dissolved the prospect of new frictions; they clearly sprang from aspirations to redefine imperial sovereignty and to create more institutional latticework that would reintegrate their multiple parts of increasingly de-centered empires. There was a simultaneous process of reassembling parts while giving them more, albeit partial, autonomy during the revolutionary conjuncture—which made governance complex, but not futile. Even where insurrection coursed through transatlantic sinews, as in France's or Britain's empires, these were hardly feeble and brittle regimes lying in wait for the last blow to bring them down; what is more, the insurgents were more concerned with defending rights within empire than the right to defect from it. The conventional story organized around a narrative of "origins," which points to resistances to integration as precursive to secessionist struggles, conflates the tensions associated with reassembling imperial parts and pacts with evidence of unavoidable demise.[27]

One of the reasons why the elasticity of empires has often been overlooked in favor of depictions of their essentially decrepit natures is that empires are usually

[26] José Ignacio de Pombo, *Comercio y contrabando en Cartagena de Indias* (1800; repr., Bogotá, 1986); José da Silva Lisboa, *Observações sobre a prosperidade do estado pelos liberaes principios da nova legislação* (Rio de Janeiro, 1810); Gabriel B. Paquette, "State-Civil Society Cooperation and Conflict in the Spanish Empire: The Intellectual and Political Activities of the Ultramarine *Consulados* and Economic Societies, c. 1780–1810," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39, no. 2 (2007): 263–298.

[27] John Lynch, "The Origins of Spanish Independence," in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 3: *From Independence to c. 1870* (Cambridge, 1985); David Brading, *Los orígenes del nacionalismo mexicano* (México, 1983).

understood as made up of a "center" radiating out to "peripheries" that necessarily grow apart, destined to orphan their parents at the first opportunity. They are seen less as products of relationships between constituent parts, in large measure because early nationalist sources preferred to see these ties as basically inflexible sources of domination, not accommodation or negotiation. This has obscured the complex interweaving of opportunism and loyalism, interests and identities, that crisscrossed imperial systems. Yet, as more historians are revealing, sovereignty did not have only one layer to it, radiating outward to territorial boundaries with concentric circles of authority; it had many layers, which rearranged according to shifting structures and circumstances. Seen in this way, the age of revolutions intensified a process of imperial adaptation to the very rivalries and interstate system that they thrived on. Only retrospectively did these adaptive frictions become associated with proto-nationalist struggles, as if reactions to tensions were themselves the cause. At the time, they exposed the fissures and internal contradictions within each regime just as the process was being driven by competition between them. Furthermore, it was not a foregone conclusion that the most muscular of these regimes would endure and the weakest decompose. It may help future research to dispense with the normative language that was so central to prophetic claims that empires were doomed models of sovereignty, and subsequent nationalists' sermons about predestined success.

In the chain of disequilibria of imperial competition, conflict, and crisis, imperial sovereignty was less fated to yield a clear alternative to empire—never mind peaceable, democratic, and national surrogates. But there was nonetheless an important break in the legal systems that braced the early modern Atlantic world together. What happened? One common answer has been the birth of national consciousnesses within the colonies. Just as inevitablist accounts of imperial decline underestimate the elasticities (and perforce the legacies) of empire, the treatment of the rise of the nation-state as no less inevitable reduces the narrative of revolutionary outcomes to the degree to which models of nationhood had been allowed to mature under imperial rule.[28] Just as we have been accustomed to closing the gap between empire and nationhood in the age of revolutions by presuming that the former was doomed, it has been a longstanding assumption that components of the latter ripened as the days of empire grew numbered. At its strongest, a nationalist teleology credits the struggle for self-determination with the demise of empire, thus closing the gap completely. For the founding generation of historians writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, and whose documentary trails provided the invisible routes for Benedict Anderson's later work on "creole pioneers," an American identity was taking shape as the empires began to collapse.[29]

[28] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991), esp. chap. 4; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (New York, 1990). On the formation of national identities more generally in colonial societies, see Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, eds., *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Princeton, N.J., 1987), where identity precedes independence, and national identity emerges from colonial resistance to empire.

[29] José Manuel Restrepo, *Historia de la revolución de la República de Colombia*, 6 vols. (1827; repr., Medellín, 1969); Bartolomé Mitre, *Historia de Belgrano y de la independencia argentina*, 4 vols. (1857;

To argue, as Anderson and others have, that nations emerged out of constructed fictive bonds promoted by communicative activity frees sovereignty from some of its primordial ("self-determining") associations, but this account of national identity casts them in opposition to, and as repudiations of, empire. Nations still stand as natural sequels to empire, and given their more "modern," leveled means of imagining social norms, they are better prepared for an Atlantic world (and eventually a globalized one) of trading nation-states. David Armitage has recently taken the argument one step further. His thoughtful examination of the global diffusion of a new model of sovereignty that was announced in 1776 traces the way it was emulated and elevated as a model document of national repudiation and state-building against empire. Thereafter, quests for self-determination could point to Jefferson's words as a founding document of statehood for what would evolve into a global network of nation-states.[30]

This suggestive argument opens the way for a less "exceptionalist" narrative of state-building and imagining citizenship (as if Americans were uniquely endowed with an ability to understand individualism and legal guarantees). But does it square with evidence of the French, Spanish, and Portuguese colonies' responses to imperial crises and their eventual secession—where independence was, in the sequence of things, more often the end of a long process of decomposition and much less of a catalyst? Some might wonder along the same lines about the thirteen colonies. There is also a logical difficulty: the causal account for change owes a great deal to the presence (or absence) of necessary conditions, implying that the outcome of modern nation-states depended on the identification of actors or agents with ideas or interests associated with systems that do not yet exist—"national," "modern," or "capitalist." Indeed, there has been a long tradition of arguing that states that "failed" (starting with an image of Haiti, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot has so trenchantly reminded us) could be reduced to the weakness of national and modern identities that made their revolutions so manqué, and thus condemned them to remain enthralled to feudal, neocolonial ways.[31] The inevitability that coats the past leaves little to the passage that connected a world governed by empires with a later cycle of national state formation. Not surprisingly, the failure or success of precursor empires and successor nations was determined long before the transformation of sovereignty set in.

But if empires were not fated to collapse, wither away, or be subsumed by successors, how are we to explain the secession of the vast majority of American colonies from the metropoles without laying the upheaval at the feet of mere circumstance, or more commonly to argue that proto-national elements were itching to free themselves from European capitals, seeking the right opportunity or pretext to justify

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repr., Buenos Aires, 1947); Carlos María de Bustamante, *Resumen histórico de la revolución de los Estados Unidos Mejicanos* (London, 1828).

[30] David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007), 19, 34.

[31] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995). And for this reason, current neoliberals often claim that they are the harbingers of a modern Latin America. See, for instance, Claudio Véliz, *The New World of the Gothic Fox: Culture and Economy in English and Spanish America* (Berkeley, Calif., 1994). For more on circularity, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (London, 1995), esp. 146–180.

overturning imperial sovereignty with a national model of statehood? How are we to trace the steps between the demise of empire, without presuming its inevitability, and the emergence of something new, without presuming its inevitability, either? The examples of the Iberian Atlantic are revealing because a long stretch of time separated the moment in which the empires went into paralysis after the end of the Peace of Amiens and their final breakup in 1821–1822. This unfolding drama, between the demise of the *anciens régimes* and the emergence of successors, says a great deal about the political nature and contingencies of the passage of sovereignty, a *politics* normally left out of the analysis of nationalism's origins, in large part because nations and empires—as the privileged repositories of sovereignty in the modern world—are more often seen as objects with definable, intrinsic features that can be plotted in narratives about "rise" or "fall," and not as arrangements, constantly reassembling themselves.

Rather than assertions of national independence against empires, much more common in the complex breakdown of empires was the exploration of models of re-accommodating colonies into imperial formations, a groping for an arrangement that would stabilize, not dissolve, regimes. Colonial and metropolitan ruling classes more often discussed the management of the crisis within a framework of "loyalty" that yielded to changes in sovereignty as *processes*, with starts that led nowhere and endings that surprised even the most prescient of actors, and eventually led actors to the "exit" option—in the sense that motivated Albert O. Hirschman to argue in *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* that people cope with crises in a variety of ways, with an "inborn tendency toward instability" of even the most perfect of mixes.[32] In the prolonged improvisation from 1807 to 1822, old systems were giving way before there was any clear sense of finding new ones, forcing historians to dispense with the discrete stages, or smooth passages, so often invoked to account for macro-social change.

The tendency to disequilibrium was embedded within an increasingly combustible interstate system, riven by warfare in the 1790s, and escalating to an epic confrontation and the shift to total Atlantic-wide war after 1805, not a brewing tempest within each empire. Indeed, the growing weakness of state structures did not provoke secessionist movements when it would have been easiest to "exit." Just as the reconstitution of empires was a response to competitive pressures of the eighteenth century, the final breakup of Iberian empires was the effect of even more heightened rivalry, not just stoked by the scramble for mercantilist possessions, but by 1800 involving a struggle for trans-regional hegemony. To this point, autonomous networks of exchange in the South Atlantic, combined with adaptations in imperial governance, fueled by an ever more vibrant slave trade, meant that declarations of loyalty to monarchy had been backed by larger pools of commercial rents. The result was a renegotiation of the pacts between colonial outposts and capitals and within the coalitions of forces in the peripheries. For the physiocratic *letrados* in Cartagena and Buenos Aires, all that was required was for authorities to turn ad hoc adjustments into a new model. This is what was transpiring in the Portuguese empire: Rodrigo de Souza Coutinho, the most influential member of the Braganza court from

[32] Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge Mass., 1970), 126.

the 1790s to 1812, observed that Portugal was far more dependent on Brazil than vice versa, and by 1804 he was concocting plans to relocate the monarchy to the new metropole, in Rio de Janeiro. To be sure, there was plenty of complaining about residual monopolies and griping about restrictions on commerce, but such tyrannies and vices were hardly grounds for defection. Far from it: ridding the empires of the agents of "corruption" would revitalize them and make them more durable. New perspectives on property, in fact, bore no automatic association with a new outlook on sovereignty.[33]

The possibility of an evolution toward a fundamentally new pact between the component parts and actors in the Iberian empires was not infinitely elastic, for it was still subject to the external dynamics of interstate conflict. Yet actors on all sides tried to rethink incumbent regimes before giving up on them; renewed warfare was the last thing anyone wanted. The governments in Lisbon and Madrid faced unenviable choices as Britain and France poised to square off once more. Until Napoleon dispatched armies across the Pyrenees in 1807, there was deep disagreement in both governments over how to face the crisis. In the end, the Spanish monarchy was toppled by Napoleon's sleight of hand, and in short order the Spanish Empire was missing its keystone, prompting an upsurge in anxiety over how to govern an empire without a king. In Portugal, the French invasion simply displaced the emblem of sovereignty instead of decapitating it, as the monarchy took refuge in a new imperial capital, the erstwhile colonial outpost of Rio de Janeiro. By becoming "Americanized," the monarchy was spared the immediate question of what bound the colonies to *ancien régime* sovereignty.[34]

Striking at the core of each empire, the French armies forced the ruling cliques in each regime to reconstitute empires with improvisations to rescue them. These improvisations, resting on new practices of public representation, shook up old pacts and ruling coalitions, and revealed the belatedness of new models of representation as well as the precociousness with which they spread, compared to the British or French empires. The first was the transformation in communications. Governments in both empires lifted restrictions on the press (in Mexico, Lima, Buenos Aires, and elsewhere) or allowed a press to begin to take root in the first place (in Brazil, Caracas, Chile, and elsewhere) to re-sacralize the monarchy and rebuild confidence in its ministers. The interim government in Spain, fleeing the pursuing French armies in Andalusia, abolished the inquisition and declared an end to state censorship. Indeed, what Miranda had thought would be the decisive weapon in the war, the printing press, served initially to promote colonial loyalty to the king and Spain. With time, however, the very instrument that was unfettered to legitimate the Spanish government gave way to more and more lurid accounts of colonial administrators' misdemeanors and eventually a means to broadcast bad news from the metropole. In Brazil, the role of the press was different; the court brought the first printing press

[33] José da Silva Lisboa, *Principios de economia política* (Lisboa, 1804), 112–116; for more details, see Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution*, chap. 4; Kenneth Maxwell, "The Generation of the 1790s and the Idea of Luso-Brazilian Empire," in Dauril Alden, ed., *Colonial Roots of Modern Brazil: Papers of the Newberry Library Conference* (Berkeley, Calif., 1973), 107–144.

[34] Brian R. Hamnett, *La política española en una época revolucionaria, 1790–1820* (México, 1985), 57–67; Valentim Alexandre, *Os sentidos do império: Questão nacional e questão colonial na crise do Antigo Regime português* (Lisbon, 1993).

with it to the colony with an eye toward using it as a means to promote closer ties between colonial subjects and the Braganza court. Either way, governments had to cope with the birth of public opinion; this meant that contending with dissent with inquisitorial zeal or indifference was likely to produce much more than mere consent of the governed. Of course, public opinion was free in degrees: it was more open in some corners, such as Buenos Aires and Bogotá, but was muzzled in Brazil and in Peru. But even these holdouts against unfettered public opinion eventually gave way.[35]

There was a second major effort to re-found imperial sovereignty. In an effort to recombine the parts of empire on the backs of "public opinion," metropolitan governments in Spain in 1808 and Portugal in 1820 called for constitutional assemblies to draft a founding charter of imperial nationhood to reinvigorate the ties between rulers and ruled. The Spanish Junta issued a clarion call to the colonies in the name of "the nation," insisting "that the Spanish dominions in America are not colonies, but an essential and integral part of the Monarchy." Accordingly, each part of the empire-nation was invited to elect envoys and dispatch them to a new assembly charged with drafting a founding charter. Much the same obtained later in Portugal. Electoral activity in towns across both empires sprang to life (with a few exceptions). However, when American delegates arrived at the assemblies, they immediately encountered a wall of resistance to their understandings of the equality of all subjects of the empire. Metropolitan delegates contrived ways to diminish the strength of colonial delegations—which did little to endear Lisbon and Madrid to colonial outposts. The burst of electoral activity was meant to bolster the legitimacy of the regimes, and to some extent it did. But it also had the effect of revealing the colonial status of American subjects, which until then could be mystified by the mechanisms of viceregal justice.[36]

"Modern" modes of representation and public spheres erupted suddenly within Iberian-Atlantic societies, nurtured by the struggle to define and mold public opinion in favor of reconstituted imperial nations, creating new means to re-found the social imaginary of empire. This shift occurred during a dramatic contest for local political, social, and economic resources, which drove contestants to seize opportunities afforded by new mechanisms of voice and representation. It is important to underscore that there was an enormous amount of confusion, which cannot be simplified or reduced to "revolutionary" or "counterrevolutionary" mobilization. Calls for independence were rare. For the most part, the feuding in the colonies was over how best to cope with the crisis of the empire, using new means to legitimate it precisely in order to revive it. Where protagonists pushed furthest to reimagine sovereignty, in Caracas, Nueva Granada, Michoacán, and Guerrero, announcements of home rule

[35] François-Xavier Guerra and Annick Lempérière, "Introducción," in Guerra and Lempérière, eds., *Los espacios públicos en Iberoamérica: Ambigüedades y problemas, siglos XVIII–XIX* (México, 1998), 5–21; Victor Uribe-Uran, "The Birth of a Public Sphere in Latin America during the Age of Revolution," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 2 (2000): 425–457; on elections in Mexico, see Guedea, "The Process of Mexican Independence"; Victor Peralta Ruíz, *En defensa de la autoridad: Política y cultura bajo el gobierno del virrey Abascal—Peru, 1806–1816* (Madrid, 2002). For a pioneering study of the late colonial press, see Renán Silva, *Prensa y revolución a finales del siglo XVIII: Contribución a un análisis de la formación de la ideología de independencia nacional* (Bogotá, 1988).

[36] *El Argos Americano*, November 18, 1811; Hamnett, *La política española*, 73–101; Jaime E. Rodríguez O., *The Independence of Spanish America* (New York, 1998), 82–91.

led to civil war. In all cases, loyalists and their armies triumphed. When a Spanish constitution was approved by deputies in the Cádiz Parliament, it seemed a plausible framework for revitalizing empire. Meanwhile, Brazilians got home rule *de facto* because there was nothing to secede from.[37]

The idea of independence was anything but contagious. More pervasive was the internal discord, at times bloodletting, over how to reassemble the shattered parts of empire into new wholes under rapidly changing political ground rules. Iberian empires, like their rivals, were under threat in various ways by 1814, but they had not broken up. Rather than decompose, they recomposed. Save the outliers of the thirteen colonies and Saint-Domingue, loyalists had the upper hand across the rest of the Americas. There were a few cases, including the band of home-rulers in the River Plate, where secession got a toehold. But for the most part, empires had managed to reintegrate themselves in spite of the metropolitan crises of total war.

This might suggest that empires had weathered total war. Some did. Others did not. Yet others gave way to new empires with New World foundings. Tracing subsequent events reveals a great deal about the multiple fates of empires and the upheavals that sundered them or gave them new significance. Instead of one fate, there was a spectrum. Some, including the British in Canada and the Caribbean, let local councils evolve to accommodate an amalgamation of local and imperial identities. The French did much the same in Guadeloupe and Martinique. The long-term result was a loyalist framework to accommodate future challenges. At the other extreme was Spain. Ferdinand, bolstered by metropolitan merchants eager to reclaim defunct privileges, was determined to reinstate Spain's centrality in an empire that had, in the meantime, reaggregated its heterogeneity. The king launched a counterrevolution to re-center the empire by tearing up the short-lived constitution and reimagining himself as a benevolent absolutist. This had the effect of emboldening a new secessionist coalition to include many who embraced home rule within the empire and its constitution. Whereas Simón Bolívar had all but given up on his cause by 1815, Spanish revanchism gave him a new lease on life, spurring many corners, classes, and castes of colonial society to resist turning the clock back. Now the civil war between loyalists intensified, and in doing so it accelerated the mobilization and militarization of Indians, slaves, and plebian populations. By 1820, Ferdinand's ambitions were not just losing him loyalists in the colonies; unrest shot through the very pillar of authority upon which he most rested: the army. When the discontent finally broke out in military revolts in the peninsula itself, the logic of restoring the *ancien régime* collapsed, bringing down the power of the monarchy in the metropole. In turn, the crisis of the Spanish Empire engulfed Portugal, which had in fact gone the farthest to reconstruct sovereignty around a new spatial balance. Lisbon caught the Spanish bug, and insisted on restoring a version of its own centrality—yielding the same outcome. When it threatened to curb Brazil's autonomy within the empire, Brazil's ruling classes rallied behind the exit option, keeping monarchy and the notion of empire for themselves precisely to preserve the privileges of an ennobled slavocracy. Thus in general, from an Iberian-colonial perspective, there was little left to remain loyal to; the armies of empire folded up their tents, joined secessionists, or went

[37] Rodríguez, *The Independence of Spanish America*, chap. 3; Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution*, chap. 5; Roderick J. Barman, *Brazil: The Forging of a Nation, 1798–1852* (Stanford, Calif., 1988), 43–55.

home. It was at this point that "declarations of independence" spread in response to the shakeup of empire at the core.[38]

An important shift in the nature of conflict over sovereignty had taken place. The effort to create a centralized system (imagined as a "restoration") had shattered the compromises of previous years. It also shifted the dynamics of local tensions, which became more and more endogenous—that is, disconnected from original causes of conflict and spiraling enough to ravage colonial coalitions. Civil war within empire took the place of total wars between empires as the source of disequilibrium. As the tensions and violence turned inward, and warfare and politics became increasingly "irregular" (in the sense that partisanship became more bellicose, and armed conflict lacked front lines), the very geographic fundaments that had been packed into the adapted notions of imperial sovereignty—that is, jurisdiction over territorial spaces up to definable limits—fractured deeply. It was these civil wars that yielded to independence, and not secession that sparked the civil war.[39]

SECESSIONS WERE RESPONSES TO CRISES OF SOVEREIGNTY, produced first by international war, and subsequently by civil war. They were not homegrown exit options maturing within empire and associated with a different model of sovereignty, announcing themselves into existence when the oppressions of empire grew too onerous or the opportunities to secede became too tempting to dismiss. Indeed, disequilibrium within empire wrought by total warfare, international then civil, toppled incumbent regimes long before successors could fill the void. This is an important point. Declarations of "independence" in the name of nations yielded to the very same propensities to breakup as the empires they rejected. It was the shift from loyalty to voice, and eventually to exit—to use Hirschman's triad—that inaugurated a search for new models of sovereignty. None of this unfolded as a natural sequence, one stage necessarily leading to the next. Indeed, during the breakup, some stages were inverted. Among many, for instance, the empires were on sounder footing in 1812 than in 1807; the French occupation of Iberia had emboldened declarations of loyalty rather than stoked the urge to secede. Elasticity of such polymorphous sovereignties, and not rigidity, gave empire more durability than historians have often credited it with. It was in fact the effort to enforce metropolitan centrality after 1815 that depleted the ranks of imperial coalitions and revived secessionist coalitions. As the Atlantic empires imploded on themselves, and the once-integrated parts broke into pieces, new understandings of sovereignty emerged, inheriting the same complex traits of regionalism, racialized labor systems, and models of representation improvised during the struggle to shore up empires.

[38] John Charles Chasteen, *Americanos: Latin America's Struggle for Independence* (New York, 2008); Margaret Woodward, "The Spanish Army and the Loss of America, 1810–1824," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 48, no. 4 (1968): 586–590; John Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808–1826* (New York, 1986), 212–214; Timothy E. Anna, *Spain and the Loss of America* (Lincoln, Neb., 1983); Isabel Lustosa, *Insultos impressos: A guerra dos jornalistas na independência, 1821–1823* (São Paulo, 2000); Barman, *Brazil*, 70–71; Márcia Regina Berbel, *A nação como artefato: Deputados do Brasil nas cortes portuguesas, 1821–1822* (São Paulo, 1999).

[39] On the self-sustaining mechanisms of civil war, see Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York, 2006), esp. 81–83, 88 on endogeneity.

The same complex inter-leaving process that connected empires to the revolutions brought them down. The age of revolutions saw empires seeking to reconstitute the elements, and at times foundations, of sovereignty, with new repositories of legitimacy for public powers assembled with old ones. The combination of an enhanced royalism with greater powers to Parliament provided a source of integration as well as division in the Anglo-Atlantic world. In the French Empire, it was the promise of freedom and some autonomy within the Revolution that kept Caribbean colonies faithful to the metropole. In the end, it was Napoleon's decision to restore slavery to Saint-Domingue that divested him of support from erstwhile loyalists among the ex-slave and freed-black populations—and even they eventually proclaimed the independence of Haiti as a more virtuous *empire* able to make good on the principles of the French Revolution that the old *empire* had betrayed. What was common was the prolonged effort to reassemble the practices of sovereignty under empire—and to rely on empire to shore up understandings of sovereignty.[40] In this fashion, the narratives about transitions from colonies to nations can be recast without conventional accounts of redemptive struggles of oppressed nations seeking liberty from venal or tyrannical imperialists as the causal forces behind revolutions. At the same time, since empires were not necessarily seen as models of sovereignty doomed to fail out of their own internal limitations or contradictions, to be resolved in a higher, more perfect form in the nation-state, the struggle to resolve the crisis of imperial sovereignty once it did set in often reproduced the same intractable features of incumbents within the regimes that replaced them. Narratives of empire need not collapse repeatedly into familiar dichotomies of empire *or* nation, empire *versus* nation.[41]

What is more, many aspects of the old regimes fell by the wayside in the course of the revolutions, but empire was not always one of them—indeed, to many colonists, constituting a sovereign state required the preservation of empire and the Americanizing of a monarchy. Not surprisingly, many elites opted to preserve the one model of sovereignty that had proved so durable, and that, now shorn of its affiliation with the Old World, could be better adapted to the New one: empire. Haiti has been mentioned. Mexico under the short-lived empire of Agustín I could be added to the list. There is also the loyalty of Cuba and Puerto Rico to Spain, which endured until the late nineteenth century, or for that matter Canada's loyalism into the twentieth. All sought to adapt themselves to an evolving imperial constitutionalism. The most overlooked example, of course, has been Brazil, as empire and monarchy mutated to subsume national, capitalist, and liberal precepts within tropical regalism, as the work of José Murilo de Carvalho has shown.[42] Brazil was a variant on a larger theme about a complex transformation riddled with contingencies in which colonial subjects did not see themselves as facing idealized choices between

[40] Brendan McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688–1776* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2006); Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires*; Knight, "The Haitian Revolution"; Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*, 349–374.

[41] Rodríguez, *The Independence of Spanish America*; José Carlos Chiaramonte, "Modificaciones del Pacto Imperial," in Antonio Annino, Luis Castro Leiva, and François-Xavier Guerra, eds., *De los imperios a las naciones: Iberoamérica* (Zaragoza, 1994), esp. 108–111.

[42] José Murilo de Carvalho, *A construção da ordem* (Rio de Janeiro, 1996).

verticalist empires ruled by monarchs and leveled nations in the garb of republican constitutions.

And yet, some revolutions dimmed the fortunes of imperial reconstitution. In Spanish America, this option could not contain the forces that had been unleashed as civil conflict within empire turned inward and became more irregular. As the forced labor systems became ravaged and plebian folk flocked to armies and guerrilla forces on all sides (half the foot soldiers of liberating armies were manumitted slaves), the plurality of notions of sovereignty was hard to contain in a single mold—whether national or imperial. Subaltern actors, from Indian villagers in Oaxaca to the free blacks of Cartagena, asserted their own views of government, adding to the disequilibria that pushed former colonial peoples farther from the possibility of any restored empire. Some of these understandings inhabited the very hybrid infrastructures of imperial sovereignty, only to acquire autonomous leases with civil war and revolution. Fueled by the struggle over public opinion and armed affiliations, the postcolonial dawn yielded to a spectrum of sovereignties—from municipal self-government, to federated provinces, to confederations of "states" under a shared constitutional umbrella, none of which could be packed back into the capacious, and frustratingly amorphous, entity of empire.[43]

With these counterpoints in mind, the story of the independence of the thirteen colonies resembles one, no less unstable, expression of subjects' efforts to grapple with models of sovereignty within empire. Loyalists' and monarchists' fidelity to the incumbent regime, and their reconstitution in the rest of British North America and the Caribbean, suggests that the decision over "exit" was less of a foreordained response to imperial change than one might surmise from the enduring appeal of epic-triumphal narratives. The declaration of 1776 might appear as one of a number of paths to recompose the principles and practices of sovereignty in the age of imperial revolutions. And even this demarche can be seen as repudiating one concept of empire without disbanding its durability altogether. What is more, as the conflict over imperial sovereignty mounted in the 1770s, the ambiguities and tensions within the patriotic cause itself became clearer as the social hierarchy began to shake when enslaved and plebian folk seized the opportunity to translate a contest over which empire would rule into a war over what had to be ruled.[44] The fates of the French, Spanish, and Portuguese empires might not look like such outliers to a conceit about exceptionalized origins of modern sovereignty and nationhood. Needless to say, the Louisiana Purchase rekindled dreams of a model of expansion for an internal slavocratic empire that would rescue the republic from its troubles.[45]

[43] Peter Blanchard, "The Slave Soldiers of Spanish South America: From Independence to Abolition," in Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age* (New Haven, Conn., 2006), 261–266; Marixa Lasso, *Myths of Harmony: Race and Republicanism during the Age of Revolution, Colombia, 1795–1831* (Pittsburgh, 2007); Peter Guardino, *The Time of Liberty: Popular Political Culture in Oaxaca, 1750–1850* (Durham, N.C., 2005).

[44] Michael A. McDonnell, *The Politics of War: Race, Class, and Conflict in Revolutionary Virginia* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2007).

[45] This recasting is explored in Eliga H. Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2000); Daniel J. Hulsebosch, *Constituting Empire: New York and the Transformation of Constitutionalism in the Atlantic World, 1664–1830* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2005); Peter S. Onuf, "'The Strongest Government on Earth': Jefferson's Republicanism, the Expansion of the Union, and the New Nation's Destiny," in Sanford Levinson and Bartholomew Sparrow, eds., *The Louisiana Purchase and American Expansion, 1803–1898* (New York, 2005), 41–68; T.

Thus European sovereignty need not be treated as comprising autopoietic and independent regimes, radiating out of bases or "centers" in Europe to aggrandize self-referential polities, to fringes in Africa, America, and Asia. It can be seen as part of a system with specific extrinsic features that came to a head in the late eighteenth century, creating revolutionary conditions that did not figure in the pages of Palmer's epic. In this respect, imperial histories should be treated as more than the outgrowths of the history of "European" national institutions. Ironically, this historiographic formulation had the tacit, but core, purpose of linking empire to nationhood in order to illustrate how the latter was a natural, more benevolent—indeed "democratic"—successor to the former, to resolve the contradictions of sovereignty of stratified empires by replacing them with a "concert," "community," or "league" of self-governing nations as an idyll of modernity.[46]

The histories of empire and nation were necessarily entwined as part of a broader, "global" conjuncture with systemic features premised on ramped-up competition between rival regimes that constituted an imperial-state system, an escalation that grew ever more fierce as the circulation of American silver and the trade in African captives raised the territorial stakes. This gave it enormous vitality and power, but also made it unstable, the source of chronic disequilibrium. In this context, empires did not "decline" as a result of basic laws of diminishing returns applied to regimes incapable of coping with more youthful, arriviste rivals. It was a crisis of sovereignty of and within empires that spawned social revolutions, not revolutionary claims that raised fundamental questions about state structures. To be sure, to observe that democratic energies were released in the course of the struggle, and not as causes of it, is not to presume that, once at work, democratic models of sovereignty resolved the basic paradoxes and instabilities of predecessors. On the contrary, sovereignty remained as equivocal as ever: empire and territorial aggrandizement at the expense of neighbors did not cease to be a common way to quench the recurrent drive to align territoriality with states, now justified in the idiom of the "nation" while carrying with them traits of old empires that would be projected inward. Instead we find a process in which old and new practices and understandings of sovereignty were reassembled, often in a desperate effort to prevent political order, and the social inequities that sustained it, from vanishing altogether. Among the consequences of this reframing of the "age of revolutions," historians might see more clearly how the legacies of empire and colonialism endured through, or were reproduced by, the very revolutions that were said to have brought about their ends. Imperial revolutions that gave way to successor regimes may have reconstituted political orders with new elements, but they hardly did away with many of the underlying ambiguities of sovereignty. It is possible to see in "imperial revolutions" struggles for rights and the origins of movements that continue to echo across the Americas, efforts that were not reducible to the necessary triumph of the nation-state.

We must look to open a passage between a world of empires and a world of nations that does not presume the inevitable demise of the former or the triumph

Alexander Aleinikoff, *Semblances of Sovereignty: The Constitution, the State, and American Citizenship* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002).

[46] See, for instance, C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London, 1989).

of the latter. Doing so frees our understandings of the politics of sovereignty from being reduced to either logic. This, after all, is what gave the age its revolutionary tonic—that there were so many plausible futures of sovereignty. Ultimately, the implications should upset what is often framed in highly normative terms: experiments that did not aggregate into national syntheses and histories of constitutional unsettlement can be spared from the condescending status as "failed states" among ungovernable peoples, as exceptions to someone's rule about "successful" states and their inspired constitutions.

Jeremy Adelman is the Walter Samuel Carpenter III Professor of Spanish Civilization and Director of the Council for International Teaching and Research at Princeton University. His most recent books include *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton University Press, 2006) and a co-authored text, *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart: A History of the World from the Origins of Humankind to the Present* (W. W. Norton, 2008).

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