

Liberty in Mexico

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Mexico

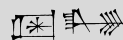
**Writings on Liberalism from the
Early Republican Period to the
Second Half of the Twentieth Century**

Edited and with an Introduction by

JOSÉ ANTONIO AGUILAR RIVERA

Translated from the Spanish by

JANET M. BURKE and TED HUMPHREY



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Contents

Introduction: Liberty and Liberalism in Mexico / ix

by José Antonio Aguilar Rivera

Acknowledgments / xxxi

1 The Founding and Early Constitutional Experiments: 1821–1840

JOSÉ MARÍA LUIS MORA / 3

- 1 Discourse on the Independence of the Mexican Empire / 5
- 2 Discourse on the Limits of Civil Authority Deduced
from Their Source / 17
- 3 Discourse on the Freedom of Thought, Speech, and Writing / 23
- 4 Discourse on the Means Ambition Uses to Destroy Liberty / 32
- 5 Discourse on the Civil Liberties of the Citizen / 40
- 6 Discourse on Laws That Attack Individual Security / 50
- 7 Discourse on the Independence of Judicial Power / 60
- 8 Discourse on Public Opinion and the General Will / 68
- 9 Discourse on the Nature of Factions / 88

LORENZO DE ZAVALA / 100

- 1 Introduction to *Historical Essay on the Mexican Revolutions
from 1808 to 1830* / 102
- 2 Conclusion to *Historical Essay on the Revolutions of Mexico
from 1808 to 1830* / 115
- 3 Intervention Regarding the Independence of the Province
of Guatemala / 134

VALENTÍN GÓMEZ FARÍAS / 137

Individual Vote of Mr. Gómez Farías on the Issue of the
Advisability of Convening a New Congress / 138

LUCAS ALAMÁN / 150

Impartial Examination of the Administration of General
Vice President Don Anastasio Bustamante / 151

2 Liberty in the Liberal Republic: 1845–1876

POLEMIC BETWEEN *EL UNIVERSAL*, *EL SIGLO XIX*,
AND *EL MONITOR REPUBLICANO*, 1848–1849 [anonymous] / 181

- 1 What Might Be the Causes of Our Ills, Part 1 / 183
- 2 What Might Be the Causes of Our Ills, Conclusion / 191
- 3 What Might Be the Causes of Our Ills, Second Article / 197
- 4 What Might Be the Causes of Our Ills, Third Article / 202

MARIANO OTERO / 206

Individual Vote in the Constituent Congress / 207

IGNACIO RAMÍREZ / 242

- 1 The National Representation / 243
- 2 Speech to the Constituent Congress, July 7, 1856 / 251
- 3 Letter to Fidel / 258

FRANCISCO ZARCO / 262

- 1 The Question of the Veto / 263
- 2 The Constitutional Order / 269
- 3 Elections / 274
- 4 Progress and Innovation / 279
- 5 Laws and Customs: The Federation and Freedom of
Religion / 285
- 6 Manifesto as Preamble to the Constitution of 1857 / 291

IGNACIO MANUEL ALTAMIRANO / 298

- 1 Against Amnesty. Speech before the Second Constitutional
Congress, July, 10, 1861 / 299
- 2 Martyrs of Tacubaya / 307
- 3 Speech by Citizen Manuel Ignacio Altamirano on the Occasion
of the Anniversary of Independence, September 15, 1861 / 314

GUILLERMO PRIETO / 321

- 1 In Favor of the Abolition of Internal Duties and Customs / 322
- 2 Freedom of Commerce / 324
- 3 On the Laws of Reform / 326
- 4 On Reforms to the Law of Public Instruction / 333
- 5 On Freedom to Work / 344

CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT OF MEXICO, 1857–1861

(BENITO JUÁREZ, MELCHOR OCAMPO, MANUEL RUIZ,
MIGUEL LERDO DE TEJADA) / 353

- 1 The Constitutional Government to the Nation / 355
(on the Laws of Reform)
- 2 Declaration to the Inhabitants of the United States of Mexico
on Freedom of Worship / 372

3 Liberty and Order: 1876–1912

JUSTO SIERRA / 381

- 1 Emilio Castelar and the Program of *La Libertad* / 382
- 2 Reservations / 385
- 3 Liberals and Conservatives / 388
- 4 Polemic with José María Vigil / 391
- 5 Our Battle Plan / 406

JOSÉ MARÍA VIGIL: POLEMIC WITH SIERRA / 408

- 1 Bulletin of *El Monitor*, August 22, 1878 / 409
- 2 Bulletin of *El Monitor*, August 27, 1878 / 415
- 3 Bulletin of *El Monitor*, September 3, 1878 / 421
- 4 Bulletin of *El Monitor*, September 6, 1878 / 426
- 5 Bulletin of *El Monitor*, September 10, 1878 / 431
- 6 Bulletin of *El Monitor*, September 18, 1878 / 436
- 7 Bulletin of *El Monitor*, September 27, 1878 / 440
- 8 Bulletin of *El Monitor*, October 22, 1878 / 444
- 9 Bulletin of *El Monitor*, October 26, 1878 / 449
- 10 Bulletin of *El Monitor*, October 30, 1878 / 454

viii : CONTENTS

- 11 Bulletin of *El Monitor*, December 17, 1878 / 458
- 12 Bulletin of *El Monitor*, December 27, 1878 / 462

EMILIO RABASA / 467

- 1 The Election / 468
- 2 Supremacy of Legislative Power / 486

4 Against the Current: 1930–1989

JORGE CUESTA / 501

- 1 Politics in the University / 502
- 2 A New Clerical Politics / 509
- 3 Crisis of the Revolution / 514

ANTONIO CASO / 518

Consciousness of Liberty / 519

OCTAVIO PAZ / 541

- 1 The Liberal Tradition / 542
- 2 Literature and the State / 548
- 3 Poetry, Myth, Revolution / 553

Index / 563

Introduction
Liberty and Liberalism in Mexico
by José Antonio Aguilar Rivera¹

After their independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century, all of the new nations of Spanish America (except for the brief and ill-fated Mexican Empire) adopted the same model of political organization: the liberal republic. At the beginning of the twenty-first century all of these countries remain republics. Yet, at the same time, the Latin American dictator became a hallmark of despotism and brutality during the past century. This contradiction between ideal and real has produced a vast body of literature. Historians, political scientists, and sociologists have tried to explain the pervasive authoritarianism of Spanish America.

One key peculiarity of Latin America among developing and former colonial regions is its liberal experience, the “ideas and institutions that became established in this outpost of Atlantic civilization.”² Yet, the failure of written constitutions to bring about the rule of law in that part of the world is well documented. This skepticism has a long history. Indeed, on December 6, 1813, Thomas Jefferson wrote to his friend Baron Alexander von Humboldt:

I think it most fortunate that your travels in those countries were so timed as to make them known to the world in the moment they were about to become actors on its stage. That they will throw off their European dependence I have no doubt; but in what kind of government their revolution will end I am not so certain. History, I believe, furnishes no example of a priest-ridden people maintain-

1. The author wishes to thank Fabiola Ramírez and Roberto Mostajo for their assistance with suggestions for research.

2. Charles A. Hale, “The Reconstruction of Nineteenth-Century Politics in Spanish America: A Case for the History of Ideas,” *Latin American Research Review* 8 (summer 1973): 53–73.

ing a free civil government. This marks the lowest grade of ignorance, of which their civil as well as religious leaders will always avail themselves for their own purposes. The vicinity of New Spain to the United States, and their consequent intercourse, may furnish schools for the higher, and example for the lower classes of their citizens. And Mexico, where we learn from you that men of science are not wanting, may revolutionize itself under better auspices than the Southern provinces.³ These last, I fear, must end in military despotisms. The different casts of their inhabitants, their mutual hatreds and jealousies, their profound ignorance and bigotry, will be played off by cunning leaders, and each be made the instrument of enslaving others.⁴

Likewise, an elderly John Adams wrote to James Lloyd in 1815:

The people of South America are the most ignorant, the most bigoted, the most superstitious of all the Roman Catholics in Christendom. . . . No Catholics on earth were so abjectly devoted to their priests, as blindly superstitious as themselves, and these priests had the powers and apparatus of the Inquisition to seize every suspected person and suppress every rising motion. Was it probable, was it possible, that such a plan as [Francisco] Miranda's, of a free government, and a confederation of free governments, should be introduced and established among such a people, over that vast continent, or any part of it? It appeared to me more extravagant than the schemes of Condorcet and Brissot to establish a democracy in France, schemes which had always appeared to me as absurd as similar plans would be to establish democracies among the birds, beasts, and fishes.⁵

3. Alexander von Humboldt traveled in South and North America at the beginning of the nineteenth century and wrote important books on the geography and society of the nations he visited. Jefferson refers in this letter to his political essay on New Spain. See Alexander von Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988).

4. Thomas Jefferson to Alexander von Humboldt, in Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), p. 1311.

5. Letter to James Lloyd, March 27, 1815, in John Adams, *The Works of John Adams*,

The independence of Spanish America did not make Jefferson more optimistic regarding the future of those nations. On May 14, 1817, he wrote to the marquis de Lafayette:

I wish I could give better hopes of our southern brethren. The achievement of their independence of Spain is no longer a question. But it is a very serious one, what will then become of them? Ignorance and bigotry, like other insanities, are incapable of self-government. They will fall under military despotism, and become the murderous tools of the ambition of their respective Bonapartes; and whether this will be for their greater happiness, the rule of one only has taught you to judge. No one, I hope, can doubt my wish to see them and all mankind exercising self-government, and capable of exercising it. But the question is not what we wish, but what is practicable? As their sincere friend and brother then, I do believe the best thing for them, would be for themselves to come to an accord with Spain, under the guarantee of France, Russia, Holland, and the United States, allowing to Spain a nominal supremacy, with authority only to keep the peace among them, leaving them otherwise all the powers of self-government, until their experience in them, their emancipation from their priests, and advancement in information, shall prepare them for complete independence.⁶

SPANISH AMERICA AND THE LIBERAL TRADITION

The importation of liberal constitutionalism into Spanish America has been the object of much political and scholarly debate. Much of the discussion has focused on the performance of institutions. As Charles Hale asserts:

Second President of the United States, comp. Charles Francis Adams, 10 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1856), vol. 10, pp. 143–45. The key reason for Adams's skepticism regarding the possibilities of democracy in South America was the deleterious consequences of religious intolerance. "They [the people of South America] believe salvation to be confined to themselves and the Spaniards in Europe. They can scarcely allow it to the pope and his Italians, certainly not to the French; and as to England, English America, and all other Protestant nations, nothing could be expected or hoped for any of them, but a fearful looking for of eternal and unquenchable flames of fire and brimstone." Ibid.

6. Thomas Jefferson to the marquis de Lafayette, in Jefferson, *Writings*, pp. 1408–9.

Much of the skepticism about the liberal experience has focused on constitutionalism—the effort to guarantee individual liberty and limit central authority by the legal precepts of a written code. The strivings of liberal legislators to establish separation of powers, federalism, municipal autonomy, and even at times parliamentary supremacy or a plural executive typify the divergence between ideals and reality and between liberal institutional forms and political practice that is the hallmark of Latin American politics.⁷

As a result, Latin America was excluded from the liberal experience by many scholars. Liberalism, they contend, was only a disguise for traditional practices. One of the supporters of this view argues that “eighteenth-century political liberalism was almost uniformly and overwhelmingly rejected by Spanish America’s first statesmen.”⁸ These authors assert that liberalism was a political tradition alien to the Spanish American nations. The British scholar Cecil Jane identified several contradictions within Spanish culture. Spaniards were idealistic extremists who sought both order and individual liberty in such perfect forms that politics went from one extreme (despotism) to the other (anarchy) rather than “finding stability in constitutional compromise between the two contending principles.”⁹ Conservatives in power carried the “pursuit of order” to such an extreme as to provoke a violent reaction in behalf of liberty. Likewise, when liberals enacted “standard western liberal protections of the individual,” Spanish Americans did not use these liberties with the responsibility expected by the “Englishmen who had developed these liberties, but rather carried them to the extreme of anarchy.”¹⁰

Richard Morse finds the key to understanding Spanish America in

7. Hale, “The Reconstruction,” p. 55.

8. Glen Dealy, “Prolegomena on the Spanish American Political Tradition,” *Hispanic American Review* 48 (February 1968): 43.

9. Lionel Cecil Jane, *Liberty and Despotism in Spanish America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929). I follow the critical review of cultural approaches of Safford. See Frank Safford, “Politics, Ideology, and Society in Post-Independence Spanish America,” in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), vol. 3, pp. 414–17.

10. *Ibid.*

the Spanish patrimonial state.¹¹ The state was embodied in the patrimonial power of the king, who was the source of all patronage and the ultimate arbiter of all disputes. Without the presence of the king the system collapsed. According to Morse, Spanish American leaders in the nineteenth century were constantly trying to reconstruct the patrimonial authority of the Spanish crown. One factor obstructing the reconstruction of authority along traditional Spanish lines, Morse argues, was the meddling of Western constitutional ideas. Anglo-French liberal constitutionalism—with its emphasis on the rule of law, the separation of powers, constitutional checks on authority, and the efficacy of elections—stood as a contradiction to those traditional attitudes and modes of behavior that lived in the marrow of Spanish Americans. Because liberal constitutionalism was ill adapted to traditional Spanish American culture, “attempts to erect and maintain states according to liberal principles invariably failed.” The authority of imported liberal constitutional ideas, while insufficient to provide a viable alternative to the traditional political model, was often sufficient to undermine the legitimacy of governments operating according to the traditional model.

These interpretations are wanting in several respects. For one thing, they treat culture in an excessively static manner; and while it is true that liberal constitutional ideas in Spanish America failed to gain the hegemony that they enjoyed in other parts of the world, they did have a significant effect on modes of political thought and became at least partially incorporated into the political rules.¹²

Never before were liberal constitutional procedures applied in so many places at the same time as in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century. To assume that this fact says nothing about liberal constitutionalism is myopic at best. Until very recently, scholars had refused to draw any lessons from the Latin American liberal experiment. While it is true that many liberal principles flew in the face of Spanish politi-

11. See Richard Morse, “Toward a Theory of Spanish American Government,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15 (1954): 71–93; Morse, “The Heritage of Latin America,” in Louis Hartz, ed., *The Founding of New Societies: Studies in the History of the United States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada, and Australia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964); and Morse, *Soundings of the New World: Culture and Ideology in the Americas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

12. Safford, “Politics, Ideology, and Society,” pp. 416–17.

cal traditions and the realities of Spanish America at the time, historians have not seized the opportunity to see Spanish America as the laboratory where liberal theories were put to the test. Until then, liberals had little empirical evidence to support their claims of universal applicability; the historical record was inconclusive at best.¹³ Why was the evidence from Spanish America disregarded by liberal pundits? Embedded in the central propositions of liberalism, Joyce Appleby contends, “was the story of its own triumph, but it was a peculiarly ahistorical one.”¹⁴ The idea of progress helps to explain why, in the eyes of past and present liberals, the failure of liberalism in Spanish America was dismissed so easily. “Shining through the darkness that was the past,” Appleby asserts, “were liberal triumphs to be recorded, examined, and celebrated. The rest of known history was useless to an enlightened present, its existence a reproach to the human spirit so long enshrouded in ignorance.”¹⁵ Since Latin America could not be celebrated as a liberal triumph it was repudiated from the liberal pantheon.

Yet, Spanish America constitutes the great postrevolutionary liberal constitutional experiment. After independence all of the revolutionary leaders moved quickly to write constitutions. As Frank Safford asserts, almost all of these constitutions “proclaimed the existence of inalienable natural rights (liberty, legal equality, security, property); many provided for freedom of the press and some attempted to establish jury trials. Almost all sought to protect these rights through the separation of powers and by making the executive branch relatively weaker than the legislature.”¹⁶ Within the first five years of the movement for independence in northern South America approximately twenty constitutions were drawn up in the provinces and capitals of the old viceroyalty of New Granada (present-day Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama). By the time Adams voiced his skepticism about the people of South America, Spanish America had already begun to experiment with

13. Even theoretically, the general applicability of the liberal constitutional model was problematic, as Montesquieu’s small-republic theory evidenced.

14. Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 8.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Safford, “Politics, Ideology, and Society,” p. 358.

the institutions of representative government, and highly competitive elections had taken place in New Spain in 1812. Recent historical studies on comparative elections in the early nineteenth century show that one of the peculiarities of Spanish America was the precocious adoption of modern forms of representation and universal suffrage when voting restrictions were predominant in Europe. Studies such as those of Richard Warren on popular participation in early elections in Mexico show that the selection of representatives by universal suffrage often had an impact on popular participation that challenges the usual depiction of elections as an exclusive and elite affair. Indeed, as both José María Luis Mora and Lucas Alamán argue in this book, one of their key political proposals in the 1830s was to *limit* broad popular participation in elections by restricting the vote to property holders. Moreover, even in countries where formal restrictions for voting applied, elections still had a significant effect on the process of democratization.¹⁷

The “liberal constitutional moment” denotes the moment, and the manner, in which liberal constitutionalism made its appearance in the Hispanic world at the dawn of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ In Spain it can be traced back to 1808. In Rio de la Plata, New Granada, and Venezuela the moment fell between 1810 and 1827; in Bolivia it was concentrated in the 1820s; and in Mexico and Guatemala its peak occurred between 1820 and 1830.¹⁹ As Frank Safford states, this “reformist burst” was followed almost everywhere by a period of pessimism and conservatism.

One of the main weaknesses of the intellectual history of the Iberian world has been its isolationism. Historians of Spanish America, Anthony Pagden asserts, “generally study Spanish America as if neither New France nor the Thirteen Colonies had ever existed.” After all, America began as Europe transplanted: “The intellectual history of its early de-

17. See, particularly, Richard Warren, “Elections and Popular Political Participation in Mexico, 1808–1836,” in Vincent C. Peloso and Barbara A. Tenenbaum, eds., *Liberals, Politics, and Power* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 30–59.

18. On the roots of Spanish liberalism, see Roberto Breña, *El primer liberalismo hispánico y los procesos de emancipación de América 1808–1824* (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 2006).

19. This periodization corresponds to Safford’s phase of initial reform in Spanish America. See Safford, “Politics, Ideology, and Society,” p. 353.

velopment is a history of transmission, and reinterpretation, a history of how traditional European arguments from classic texts were adapted to meet the challenges of new and unforeseen circumstances.”²⁰

One of the peculiarities of the liberal constitutional moment in the Hispanic world is that the sway of liberal ideas was, for the most part, uncontested.²¹ Absolutism was more a practice than an ideology. Moreover, the Bourbon absolutism that preceded the liberal revolutions in Spain and its colonies was an enlightened despotism. There was a continuity between absolutist reform and liberal revolution: a confidence in the power of reason to order society. Moreover, liberalism found in Spain native support in the theoretical writings of Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos and of schoolman Francisco Suárez.²² For Spanish liberals, however, the “enlightened” character of the monarchy ceased when Charles IV

20. Anthony Pagden, *The Uncertainties of Empire: Essays in Iberian and Ibero-American Intellectual History* (Great Yarmouth: Variorum, 1994), p. x.

21. According to Guerra, in Mexico the liberal victory was complete. François-Xavier Guerra, *Mexico: Del antiguo régimen a la revolución* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991), vol. 1, p. 184.

22. Jovellanos was the “major intellectual figure” in Spain from 1780 to 1810. See Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, *Obras*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Atlas, 1951–52). On Jovellanos’s arguments regarding the ancient constitution of Spain, property rights, and education, see Charles A. Hale, *El liberalismo mexicano en la época de Mora, 1821–1853* (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1972), pp. 66–73. See also John R. Polt, *Jovellanos and His English Sources* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1964). In the seventeenth century, the Jesuit Francisco Suárez was of the opinion that a monarchy—or rule “by one head”—afforded the best form of political government. Yet, the source of the king’s power was an act of transfer on the part of the community as a whole, expressive of its “own consent.” In transferring its power to a monarch, a community did not deliver itself into “despotic servitude.” The transfer was made “under obligation, the condition under which the first king received the kingdom from the community.” The monarch should rule “politically.” One who ruled otherwise ruled tyrannically. In extreme circumstances such a ruler might lawfully be deposed. See Francisco Suárez, *Tractatus de Legibus ac Deo Legislatore* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1971–81). Besides his *Tractatus de Legibus* (1610), Suárez’s other influential works include *Defensio Fidei Catholicae et Apostolicae Adversus Anglicanae Sectae Errores* (1613) and *Opus de Triplici Virtute Theologico: Fide, Spe, et Charitate* (1621). See also J. H. Burns, ed., *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 292–97.

and his favorite minister, Godoy, showed clear signs of political incompetence.²³

Several developments prepared the ground for the uncontested predominance of liberalism in the early nineteenth century. First, there was no classical republican tradition to dispute the field; Spain had no equivalent of James Harrington. As the fifteenth-century debate between Leonardo Bruni and Alonso de Cartagena over the merits of Bruni's translation of the *Ethics* showed, the Italians saw Aristotle as an author whose texts had some literary and philosophical merit, while the Spaniards regarded him merely as "an exponent of natural virtue."²⁴ Although the impact of humanist Aristotelianism was felt in Spain at about the same time as it was in Italy, by the end of the sixteenth century Spain had reached the brink "of that desperate obscurantism so characteristic of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."²⁵ When Florentine political thought was flourishing in Italy, the School of Salamanca was instead devoted to new scholasticism and speculative thought.

The other historical development that proved crucial for Spanish liberalism was the French Revolution. Hispanic revolutionaries would have to perform two different tasks at the same time: on the one hand, to make the revolution, on the other, to avoid following the steps of France.²⁶ The terms "liberalism" and "liberal" were coined by the Spanish Cortes Generales²⁷ in Cádiz while drafting the 1812 Constitution.²⁸

23. François-Xavier Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias: Ensayos sobre las revoluciones hispánicas* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica/MAPFRE, 1992), pp. 26–27.

24. Anthony Pagden, "The Diffusion of Aristotle's Moral Philosophy in Spain, ca. 1400–ca.1600," in *Uncertainties of Empire*, p. 305. See also Anthony Pagden, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination: Studies in European and Spanish-American Social and Political Theory 1513–1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

25. Pagden, *Uncertainties of Empire*, p. 312.

26. Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias*, p. 251.

27. The *cortes* were the legislatures in Spain.

28. For the Spanish origin of the term "liberal," see Vicente Llorens, "Sobre la aparición de *liberal*," in *Literatura, Historia, Política* (Madrid: n.p., 1967). "Liberal," as a political label, J. G. Merquior asserts, "was born in the Spanish Cortes of 1810, a parliament that was rebelling against absolutism." J. G. Merquior, *Liberalism Old and New* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), p. 2. Claudio Véliz asserts: "It is fair to add that its [the term "liberal"] international career was actually launched by the poet Robert Southey, who in 1816,

To recast the Spanish American revolutions as constitutive elements of the liberal experience it is necessary to assess the effectiveness of the institutional strategies designed to limit the power of absolute sovereigns in large states that are found at the core of the modern liberal republic.²⁹

Before the American Revolution there was no historical precedent to predict where the application of the ideas of the Enlightenment would lead. Abstract thinking was much more important in the American and French cases than in the Iberian world. Furthermore, the impact of the French Revolution on Spanish elites was mainly negative. Spanish American revolutionaries knew, from the French experience, where the revolutionary logic could lead.³⁰ These fears were not without foundation: a large population of these countries consisted of oppressed Indians. The slave revolt of Santo Domingo reminded them of the dangers of a social revolution. Thus, the reactionary atmosphere of Europe “both reinforced these fears and also subjected Spanish American leaders to more conservative ideological influences than they had known before 1815.”³¹

The most singular trait of the Spanish American revolutions is the absence of both modern popular mobilization and Jacobinism.³² This assertion runs counter to a long-established tradition that considers the Spanish American revolutions as the ideological heirs of the 1789 revolution.³³ The “decisive” influence of Rousseau over Spanish Ameri-

used the Spanish form as a scornful epithet addressed to the British Whigs whom he described as ‘British *liberales*’ in an obvious reference to the Spanish political faction responsible for the disorderly and ultimately unsuccessful reforms initiated by the cortes of Cádiz in 1812.” Claudio Véliz, *The New World of the Gothic Fox: Culture and Economy in English and Spanish America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 130.

29. As Biancamaria Fontana asserts, the accent of the liberal republic was not so much on hereditary government as on “the limited, moderate character of the power that *any* government should be allowed to exercise.” Biancamaria Fontana, “Introduction: The Invention of the Modern Republic,” in Biancamaria Fontana, ed., *The Invention of the Modern Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 1–5.

30. Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias*, p. 35.

31. Safford, “Politics, Ideology, and Society,” p. 359.

32. Terror would preclude terror from happening in the ensuing revolutions. Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias*, p. 36.

33. See José Miranda, *Las ideas y las instituciones políticas mexicanas* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1952); Solange Alberro, Alicia Hernández,

cans is, for many historians, an uncontested fact. Yet, this interpretation misses one of the most distinctive features of the Spanish American revolutions. Paraphrasing J. G. A. Pocock, the Spanish American revolutions can be seen less as the last political act of Jacobin radicalism than as the first political act of modern liberalism. Not Rousseau but Benjamin Constant would prove to be the most relevant influence for Spaniards and Spanish Americans in the early nineteenth century. The universal influence of Constant in the 1820s and 1830s, Safford states, “is only one indication of the hegemony of moderate European constitutional ideas among Spanish American intellectuals.”³⁴ The influence of Constant is important because modern liberalism owes much to him.³⁵ Many of Constant’s ideas, particularly those developed in response to the Terror and its Thermidorian aftermath (such as the limited nature of popular sovereignty, the freedom of the press, the inviolability of property, and the restrictions upon the military), became incorporated into the liberal theory that still informs many of the constitutions of democratic countries today.

Constant provided Spanish Americans with a practical guide to con-

and Elías Trabulse, eds., *La revolución francesa en México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1992); Leopoldo Zea, ed., *América Latina ante la revolución francesa* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1993); and Jacqueline Covo, “La idea de la revolución francesa en el congreso constituyente de 1856–1857,” *Historia Mexicana* 38 (July–September 1988), 69–79.

34. “[T]he three authors most frequently encountered were Montesquieu, Constant, and Bentham. Rousseau, of great help in justifying the establishment of revolutionary governments between 1810 and 1815, was decreasingly relevant to Spanish American concerns after 1820.” Safford, “Politics, Ideology, and Society,” p. 367. See also Ricardo Levene, *El mundo de las ideas y la revolución hispanoamericana de 1810* (Santiago: Editorial Jurídica de Chile, 1956), pp. 179–218.

35. On Constant, see Benjamin Constant, *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Constant, *Principles of Politics Applicable to All Governments*, trans. Dennis O’Keeffe, ed. Etienne Hofmann (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003); Guy H. Dodge, *Benjamin Constant’s Philosophy of Liberalism: A Study in Politics and Religion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Stephen Holmes, *Benjamin Constant and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Etienne Hofmann, *Les “Principes de politique” de Benjamin Constant*, 2 vols. (Geneva: Droz, 1980); and Marcel Gauchet, ed., *Benjamin Constant: De la liberté chez les modernes* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1980).

stitution making.³⁶ The political elite was interested, above all, in works devoted to the practical arts of government rather than in “abstract theoretical treatises on the foundation of sovereignty”; thus, Spanish Americans turned to Constant’s *Curso de política* for its usefulness in constitution writing.³⁷ Constant was also popular among Spanish readers, Hale asserts, because they found themselves in a similar circumstance: José María Luis Mora and other liberals faced revolution and arbitrary power, just as Constant did in 1815. Therefore they shared the latter’s urgency for establishing safeguards for individual liberty, an urgency that “was not felt in the Anglo-Saxon world.”³⁸

Despite the decades of factional struggle and cyclical outbursts of dictatorship that followed independence in many Latin American countries, the search for a constitution and the reform of the old order were the main motivations behind the different groups in dispute. Later on, as most countries entered a phase of increasing political stability by the mid-nineteenth century, the observance of constitutional norms and liberal values was also essential to understand crucial conflicts among the political elite.

LIBERTY AND LIBERALISM IN MEXICO

As political practice strayed from ideal, Mexican historians and politicians sought to reaffirm the country’s liberal past. Many books and articles have attempted to show that liberalism was at the core of the founding of the republic in spite of authoritarian practices.³⁹ Liberal theories had to contend with traditional ideas and practices, such as the common negotiation among actors over the enforcement of laws, as well as long-established patron-client relations. For years, historians debated

36. Translations of Constant were readily available to Spanish-speaking readers. The standard translation was Benjamin Constant, *Curso de política constitucional*, trans. Marcial Antonio López (Madrid: Imprenta de la Compañía, 1820). In his translation, López suppressed the part of the book devoted to religious tolerance. He claimed that tolerance was irrelevant to Spanish Americans because the only religion practiced there was Roman Catholicism.

37. Safford, “Politics, Ideology, and Society,” p. 367.

38. Hale, *Liberalismo mexicano*, p. 72.

39. This scholarship is epitomized by Jesús Reyes Heróles, *El liberalismo mexicano*, 3 vols. (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988).