

# Introduction

*Francisco Colom González and Angel Rivero*

Since its inception in the aftermath of World War II, Atlantic history has gained momentum as a discipline focused on a geographical realm that has for a long time been perceived in a fragmented way. There are several antecedents demanding a new historical narrative that transcends the narrowness of the old national approaches. In 1932 Herbert E. Bolton proposed a pioneering continental perspective on the New World that reflected 'the epic of Greater America'. He suggested that the processes conventionally studied from a national perspective were indeed 'phases common to most portions of the entire Western Hemisphere', and that 'each local story will have clearer meaning when studied in the light of the others [...]; much of what has been written of each national history is but a thread out of a larger strand'.<sup>1</sup> Most current historians have come to accept the futility of considering from local perspectives a series of processes that were in fact of a transatlantic and hemispheric dimension. In 1949 Fernand Braudel's path-breaking work on the Mediterranean put the model in place for the so far elusive attempts to write a similar history of the Atlantic world.<sup>2</sup> The vast diversity of natural environments, cultures, and human groups that border the Atlantic rim are mainly responsible for such elusiveness, as it is difficult to identify elements that have been shared by the entire region and that can be equally accessible to different fields of scholarship.

The emergence of an Atlantic approach to modern history was eventually the collateral result of political developments, and more concretely of the Cold War, as Bernard Bailyn has observed.<sup>3</sup> From the international political arena this perspective jumped into the realm of academia, where historians of colonial societies, empires, and the slave trade found in it a way out of the theoretical restrictions imposed by national historiographical conventions. Although this oceanic world was built by the enduring interaction of Europeans, Americans and Africans, the Atlantic as a historical space was in its origins a European creation, for it was through European navigation, trade, conquest, and colonization that its four shores came to be connected and represented as

---

1 Herbert E. Bolton (1933) 'The Epic of Greater America', in *American Historical Review*, 38/3, 448–474.

2 Fernand Braudel (1972) *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row).

3 Bernard Bailyn (1996) 'The Idea of Atlantic History', *Itinerario* 20/1, 19–44.

an integrated unity. With time, however, the concept of Atlantic history has developed nuanced differentiations. The seminal idea stated that during the early modern period the European, American, and African shores of the Atlantic could be dealt with as a single unit of analysis and a clear chronology. This view has been challenged by more recent approaches highlighting the existence of *multiple Atlantics*: for example, a black or Afro-American Atlantic, a South Atlantic, an Iberian Atlantic. Similarly, whereas the Age of Discovery is generally recognized as marking the beginning of a relatively coherent period of colonial domination, intercontinental trade, and cultural exchange, its terminus has been more contested. For this reason, Atlantic history has continued to mean different things to different people and in different academic fields.<sup>4</sup>

Intellectual history has not been alien to these developments. Initially, it seemed awkward to portray the history of ideas as being interlinked with the developments of a maritime space. Even if the conventional canon of political thought has always been implicitly Eurocentric, it is usually represented as constituting a *universal* patrimony. The fact is that modern political theory cannot be studied without taking into account the inter-oceanic connections and the role of the Atlantic as a space for the circulation of ideas. We need simply to bring to mind the resonance of an overseas world in the utopias of the Renaissance, the sixteenth-century debate on the justice of the Conquest of America or the repercussion of John Locke's involvement in the colonial enterprise on his theory of property. The discovery, cognition, and appropriation of a New World overseas was an immense challenge to the political imagination of early modern Europe, a task for which the references of classical antiquity were of limited usefulness. The boundaries of political sovereignty had to be readjusted to the new geographic reality. Similarly, the uncertain status of the American natives – their alleged state of nature or barbarism – and the moral limits to their dispossession and subjugation had to be ascertained.

The vessels that transported commodities and human beings across the Atlantic also brought with them new notions on the just order of society and diffuse expectations about the future in a land of promise. This was certainly not the case for the peoples that endured the impact of European colonization and for the thousands of African slaves who survived the brutal conditions of the Middle Passage. In an ironical inversion, the image of the Americas as a utopic reference for liberty and prosperity was built upon denial of such ideals to a vast portion of its native and imported population. This is a fact that no

---

4 Alison Games (2006), 'Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities', *American Historical Review* 111/3, 741–757.

book dealing with the idea of liberty in the Atlantic world can ignore, but at the same time such a topic demands in-depth treatment that the present volume cannot undertake without deviating from its main objective. The main allusions here to slavery will therefore be found in relation to the colonial crisis, the opportunities open to slaves by the military necessities of the contending parties during the wars of independence, and the role played by that *peculiar institution* in the internal organization of the new independent states. In fact, for a long time the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) and the subsequent slaughter of the white settlers in the island acted as a deterrent to the political ambitions of the Creoles in the Caribbean. The historical *delay* of Cuban independence until the end of the nineteenth century, for instance, can be interpreted as a side effect of the reliance of the local slave-owners on the Spanish authorities. Long before that, in a report written in 1802, the Captain General of Caracas warned the government in Madrid against the global consequences of the slave rebellion that was developing in Haiti.

The peril that the example of such an insolent usurpation represents to the European dominions in America cannot be concealed anymore. If the triumphs of that arrogant Negro [Toussaint-Louverture] were to continue, the colonies of the New World would yield a terrible example to the temerity of all the coloured peoples that the different metropolis will be in no position to remedy. The American possessions are thus on the verge of the most abominable commotion in their commerce, agriculture, and political subsistence.<sup>5</sup>

The crisis of European colonialism in the Americas has been the cornerstone for the Atlantic interpretation of political modernity. Robert R. Palmer was the first to summarize the period between 1760 and 1800 as an age of *democratic revolutions* that changed the political foundations of both America and Europe.<sup>6</sup> In a different vein, John G.A. Pocock has popularized the idea of an *Atlantic republican tradition* that would eventually extend its influence from Renaissance Italy, through the English Civil War, to the American Revolution.<sup>7</sup> The Iberian world and Haiti were conspicuously absent from both studies, their

---

5 Letter from Manuel de Guevara Vasconcelos, Captain General of Caracas, to the Secretary of State; 29 January 1802. Archivo General de Indias. Estado, 59, N.17/1.

6 Robert R. Palmer (1956) *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

7 J.G.A. Pocock (1975) *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

experiences thus erased from the records of the Atlantic constitutional process.<sup>8</sup> So was Canada, whose itinerary towards political liberty ironically reverses that of the United States. If we were to accept these omissions we could reluctantly conclude that Lockean, Machiavellian, and Rousseauian doctrines did not take root in Latin American soil, and that Tory ideas monopolized the Canadian political imagination during its foundational period. It is common knowledge nowadays that democratic and liberal ideas were indeed present and active in the early constitutional experiences of Spain, Portugal, and Latin America. They also peppered the *Patriot's* movement in Upper and Lower Canada during the 1837–38 rebellions, even if de Tocqueville did not seem to have perceived the political malaise brewing under the surface when he visited the region a few years earlier.

The reasons for these gaps in conventional historiography probably run deeper than the few decades that separate the North Atlantic and Iberian revolutions, or the gradualism that characterized state formation in Brazil and Canada. As a collateral result of American Loyalism, the history of British North America has usually been confined behind the continental divide that Seymour Lipset recognized in his classic comparison of American and Canadian political cultures.<sup>9</sup> In the Latin American case, the historiographical prejudice is somehow older. From John Quincy Adams to Hegel, the intuition that the political changes in the southern part of the hemisphere obeyed a different set of rules and motives from the north has had followers galore. For very different reasons, during the nineteenth century Latin American *historias patrias* adopted an opposite perspective. The wish to break up with the colonial past urged local historians to attribute an ideological continuity to all the revolutions in both American continents. An alternative viewpoint also became prevalent in the 1940s, when a series of conservative scholars asserted the existence of a specific *Hispanic path* to modernity that had drawn its inspiration from Catholic values. According to this, the intellectual roots of the Spanish-American emancipation stemmed from Salamanca and Iberian scholasticism, and not from Paris, Geneva, and the Enlightenment.

The Atlantic approach has helped alleviate the burden of this sort of historical exceptionalism. The political upheaval that shattered European colonial empires at the end of the eighteenth century and gave birth to a new order in the Americas is currently studied in a more interconnected fashion, as a series

---

8 José Antonio Aguilar (2000) *En pos de la quimera. Reflexiones sobre el experimento constitucional atlántico* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica).

9 Seymour M. Lipset (1990) *Continental Divide: the Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge).

of *Atlantic revolutions*.<sup>10</sup> English-speaking academia has similarly opened up to a broader understanding of the Atlantic space.<sup>11</sup> Taking this revolutionary cycle as an axis, this book tries to shed light on the historical background, theoretical origins, and political traditions that have been often neglected by conventional approaches to Atlantic history, and it does so by resorting to authors stemming from different vernacular environments. Furthermore, democracy and liberalism are not conceived here as a mere agglomerate of ideas transmitted through readership or editorial circulation, but mainly as normatively oriented social practices with a discursive dimension, which we here call the *traditions of liberty*. Here we can identify different vernacular and borrowed elements that travelled back and forth the Atlantic and took root on both its shores.

The chronology of these experiences does not necessarily imply a causal nexus or a Eurocentric centre–periphery development. The political and ideological relations involved in them are more complex than this. Rather, we should conceive of the Atlantic space at the gates of the revolutionary cycle as a geopolitical network whose internal connections had been expedited by the consequences of the Seven Years' War (1756–63). After the loss of New France to England, the eclosion of the American Revolution prompted the French intervention in the colonial conflict; inversely, France's war effort against Britain in America triggered the economic predicament that catalysed the French Revolution. What is less known is that Spain was also instrumental in the American war of independence, that the expansion of the Anglo-American frontier to the West and the blockade and temporary loss of some Spanish outposts in Cuba and the Philippines during the Seven Years' War prompted the metropolis to initiate a series of military, administrative, and economic reforms that planted the seeds of later political developments.

By forcing a continental blockade on Britain in 1806, Napoleonic France pushed Britain to pursue new markets in Southern America. This commercial and strategic reaction created a new relation between Britain and the emerging powers in this part of the Atlantic world. From the mid-eighteenth century, the feel of *decline* of the Spanish monarchy was evident both to its administrators and to its adversaries. The Bourbon reforms tried to regain some of the competences that the fiscal crisis under the late Hapsburgs had forced the Crown to offer for sale. The expectation, as Anthony Pagden has portrayed in his chapter in this book, was to reorganize the empire in order to convey it a new purpose and identity based on agricultural production and commercial

---

10 Wim Kloost (2010) *Revolutions in the Atlantic* (New York: New York University Press)

11 David Armitage, ed. (1998) *Theories of Empire, 1450–1800* (Aldershot and Brookfield: Ashgate).

trade, rather than go on relying on mineral extraction, imports taxation, and military domination. The composite structure of the monarchy should therefore give place to a modern colonial system through which both the metropolis and its overseas subjects would reap the beneficial effects of commerce. The rearrangement of imperial policy along the lines of enlightened commercial humanism implied, however, to redress what had been originally the unintended result of the economic paucity of the Crown, a de facto co-option of local administration in America by the dominant Creole groups. This administrative reappropriation, though, was interpreted by the colonial elite as a denial of liberty. In Bolívar's famous words, the Spanish-American Creoles had been 'harassed by a conduct that not only had deprived them of their rights but kept them in a sort of permanent infancy with regard to public affairs [...] We have even been deprived of an active tyranny, since we have not been permitted to exercise its functions.'<sup>12</sup>

The initial act of the Spanish-American Revolution was bred at the core of the empire, with the collapse of the monarchy as an effect of Napoleon's invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 1807–08 and the deposition of the Spanish king. From there it was projected onto its American colonies as a crisis of political legitimacy, which created a power vacuum that encountered a varied but simultaneous response. In Portugal, the transplantation of the Royal Court to Rio de Janeiro prevented a development similar to that in Spain, but it completely altered the political relations within the empire, as Brazil was raised to the status of a kingdom within the Crown, which eventually led to the dissolution of the bond that had united both Atlantic shores of the Braganza dynasty. The relation between freedom and colonialism was thus a crucial one. Empires could hold heterogeneous political bodies under the same authority, but could republics, or for that matter, constitutional regimes, preserve their freedom, and yet possess colonies? The answer to this question would prove negative: no transatlantic *nations* were created out of the old colonial empires. However, in an interesting contrast, the federalization of the colonial link that was rejected by the British parliament first and by the constitutional processes in Spain and Portugal later, found a new opportunity in the remaining British possessions in North America, out of which the Dominion of Canada emerged as a reaction to the events taking place south of its border.

Thus, there is clearly an Atlantic space of political connections and socio-economic processes that brought about a new regional system by abolishing

---

12 Simon Bolívar (1951) 'Reply of a South American to a Gentleman of this Island' [*Jamaica letter*, 1815] in *Selected Writings of Bolívar*, trans. Lewis Bertrand (New York: The Colonial Press).

the precedent. Similarly, the implementation of liberal and democratic rights involved a series of continental-wide debates on the meanings of liberty, political dignity, and the suitable institutions for a free and orderly society. But beyond this family resemblance, can we recognize a distinctively Atlantic political tradition shared by all the historical actors in the region? If the establishment of constitutional regimes followed different courses, there are a number of basic ideas that were certainly shared by all of them. First, there is the idea of independence as a precondition of a free polity: liberty in the Euro-American Atlantic implied the termination of the colonial bond. Connected with this idea of independence is a new understanding of sovereignty. In the British Whig tradition, all the constitutive parts of society shared sovereignty: the king, the nobility, and the commons. In the French absolutist tradition, sovereignty was synonymous with the authority of the monarch. After the Atlantic revolutions, sovereignty was no longer a balance between the social estates nor an attribute of the king: it belonged to a collective body termed the *people* or the *nation*, even if it was not easy to define *who* made up such people or nation. The third feature of this shared tradition is the notion of individual rights. These were not a completely new idea, for its roots go deep into the political history of Christianity. What was new was the juridical codification of such rights in a Constitution or a Bill of Rights in order to set limits to collective political power. The polity, as in the past, was understood as a common effort for achieving security and happiness for all, but the goal of life in common was now instrumental to individual flourishing.

The different chapters in this book show how independence, sovereignty, and individual rights crystallized in dissimilar political forms: the United States was founded as a republic; France began as a constitutional monarchy, then became a republic, a consulate, an empire, and back to constitutional monarchy; Britain was a constitutional monarchy since the end of the seventeenth century, but constitutional values were reinforced in this period; from its inception Brazil was founded as a constitutional monarchy; Spain, like Portugal, converted monarchy to constitutionalism through a political revolution disguised as legal reformation; and except for the two monarchical intervals in Mexico, the new independent states in Spanish America assumed a republican form. So if independence, sovereignty, and individual rights were embodied in different political forms, they nonetheless can be summarized in a single word: constitutionalism. What was a radical novelty then has since become a permanent feature of the Atlantic political order.

These issues have been organized into three main sections in this book: the antecedents to the dissolution of the colonial empires, the independence movements, and the varieties of liberalism that took root during the process of



state formation. In the first chapter, Rubem Barboza Filho addresses the plight of Brazilian modernity. According to the conventional narrative of state formation in Brazil, the legacy of three centuries of Portuguese colonialism was perceived as a historical burden that had to be eliminated for the sake of social modernization. The move into oblivion of the baroque colonial heritage, sanctioned by the intuitive contraposition between *backward* and *modern* societies, resulted in the sacrifice of entire generations of the Brazilian people for the sake of an idealized country that was to be created in the future by the modernizing elites. Here Barboza Filho views the baroque as the aesthetic cauldron in which an original Ibero-American civilization took shape and found a way for self-expression. Much in the vein of authors like Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, José Antonio Maravall, Octavio Paz, or Severo Sarduy he reacts against the *demophobic* bias of such modernizing ideologies and seeks to demonstrate the inclusive and democratic potential of Brazilian baroque and popular culture. For this purpose he develops a three-tiered philosophical interpretation of modernity as interplay between the *languages* of reason, interest, and affection. Far from reflecting the struggle between backwardness and modernism, early independent Brazil became a struggling arena for these three languages and their consubstantial possibilities, a dispute that culminated with the defeat of the *language of affections*, and the triumph of an impoverished modernity solely imagined in the terms of *reason* and *interest*.

Anthony Pagden explores, in the second chapter, the changing political imagination of the Spanish-speaking world: from the composite monarchy of the early modern period, the attempts at an imperial confederation, and the failed devise of an Atlantic constitutional arrangement with the colonies, to the final crisis that paved the way for independence. This evolution and ultimate rupture did not go without ideological discussion. Pagden compares the internal appraisals on the weakness of the Spanish Monarchy, which censured the mounting costs of incessant territorial expansion, with the external critiques that saw the source of Spanish decadence in its religious intransigence and the reckless pursuit of military glory. He also highlights the political and ideological divergence that developed between Spain and its former colonies, and the emergence of two very different kinds of republican projects in British and in Spanish America, which have been conventionally labelled *ancient* and *modern*. According to Benjamin Constant's famous definition, ancient republics were prone to militarism and committed all their citizens to the common project of its government and defence.<sup>13</sup> As a result of this, individual autonomy

---

13 Benjamin Constant (1988 [1819]) 'The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns', in *Political Writings*, trans. and ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), 308–328.



was completely subjected to the authority of the community. Modern republics, by contrast, are large commercial societies ruled through representation, where private life remains separate from the public arena. Pagden concludes that even if it would be an oversimplification to suggest that the cultural and political traditions of Spanish-Americans were exclusively drawn from the ancient model, ~~that~~ their leaders were never able to escape the type of Cesaristic republicanism that pervaded their political vision.

The aim of Ambrosio Velasco in the following chapter is precisely to demonstrate that the roots of this Latin American *ancient* republicanism do not derive exclusively from Rousseauian doctrine or the classical tradition. The humanistic culture of New Spain, with its iusnaturalistic approach to indigenous rights – as reflected, for instance, in the work of Fray Alonso de la Vera Cruz, a Novo Hispanic philosopher and missionary – offered the intellectual basis for a type of Creole patriotism that, in the author's view, impregnated the Mexican movements for independence. Much like Barboza Filho in the case of Brazil, Velasco finds that the sources of an original Novo Hispanic–Mexican political tradition, deeply ingrained in baroque colonial culture, were erased by the ideological bias of nineteenth-century liberalism.

José María Hernández also explores the motives for Spanish-American independence in his chapter, but he does so from a different angle: the idea of *decorum* and its rooting in Spanish political philosophy. Decorum demands that political actors adapt themselves to the changing circumstances and expectations with certain standards of human dignity. In the Spanish tradition of government, at least from the early sixteenth century, decorum could be best understood in terms of the necessary unity of natural, civil, and divine law. In this tradition, every political change should be fully congruent with the representation of such unity. However, with the Napoleonic invasion of Spain and the outbreak of the Spanish-American rebellions, decorum adopted a whole new dimension. In the revolutionary *juntas* organized to resist the French invasion, decorum – now understood in America as equal representation with the metropolis, and ultimately as independence from it – re-emerged as the right and sole answer to the new situation.

The Brazilian path to independence was exonerated from the tortuous and violent circumstances of Spanish-American emancipation. The relocation of the Portuguese Crown in Rio de Janeiro while fleeing the Napoleonic invasion, together with the conditions imposed on it by the alliance with Britain, completely transformed the traditional relations between centre and periphery in the Portuguese Empire. In an ironic turn of history, Portugal – now under the administration of a British pro-consul – became the periphery, and Brazil the metropolis. Unlike Spain, the continued authority of the Braganza dynasty in America prevented the *balkanization* of her colonial dominions. In their

respective chapters Cicero Araujo, Gabriela Nunes Ferreira, and Angel Rivero explore the consequences of this peculiar process on both sides of the Portuguese Atlantic. Araujo and Nunes Ferreira recreate the conceptual tension between territoriality and freedom that characterized the debate on the republic during the *ancien régime*. In the eighteenth century, as they have noticed, the city-republic was in fact a residual political form. Under the influence of Montesquieu, the parliamentary regime established in England after the Glorious Revolution was generally viewed as an amalgamation of monarchical and republican institutions, and also as a more promising model for the preservation of freedom than the ancient republics. A key issue was nevertheless the compatibility between *republic* and *empire* as political forms, and more precisely whether republics could preserve their freedom while possessing colonial domains. The advent of the crisis of European imperialism in the Americas would bring these questions onto centre stage. The authors compare from this perspective the American and Brazilian independence processes, and maintain that, in spite of the obvious differences, both cases expressed unresolved constitutional issues resulting from the tensions between absolutism and the rise of parliamentary rule. For them, the British case is significant because it revealed the possibilities and limitations for reform within the *ancien régime*, and the impact of these on the imperial domains. The evolution of the English monarchy towards a parliamentary regime after the Glorious Revolution in 1688 had eroded the role of the king as a personification of imperial unity and tightened the subjection of the colonies to the metropolis. This is why, according to Araujo and Nunes Ferreira, the revival of republicanism in the Anglo-American colonies was possible only after the meaning of the *republic* was completely reversed during the discussion on the imbalances of imperial relations. In Brazil, the hosting of the royal court had a similar effect on the transatlantic relations of the empire as soon as the liberal revolution triumphed in Portugal in 1820. However, as they point out, there are major differences between both experiences in relation to the political form of the new independent states, their territorial structure, and the role of slavery in them.

All this brings us to consider the varieties of liberalism that took root in these regions at the end of the revolutionary cycle. By 1825, the British subjects living in the colonies that later became Canada were – together with the Cuban and Puerto Rican Creoles – the only colonists of European ancestry in the Americas who had not joined the revolutionary movements. Nor did they adopt grandiloquent founding documents based on the rhetoric of liberty. This has conventionally led to the viewing of political practices in the British North American colonies as being part of a counter-revolutionary tradition.



In his chapter, Michel Ducharme makes the inaccuracy of such assessment clear. He uses the Canadian case to illustrate how the ideology that cast American Loyalists (and future Canadian subjects) against American Patriots cannot be framed as an opposition between revolutionary liberalism and counter-revolutionary conservatism. Both experiences refer to a contraposition between revolutionary republicanism and commercial liberalism instead, which were respectively labelled as *Country* and *Court* ideology. The Constitutional Act of 1791, by means of which the political foundations of Upper and Lower Canada were settled, rested indeed on a *modern* concept of freedom. This was, however, a freedom based on British-styled parliamentary sovereignty, not on popular or national sovereignty, as in the United States and France.

It was also this modern version of freedom that was instituted in Portugal by the revolution of 1820, but the new Constitution portrayed it as a restoration of the traditional Portuguese liberties, not as a political innovation. In his chapter, Angel Rivero shows that although political ideas are important for the course of political events, the context in which they are put to work is at least equally important. Thus, as the Portuguese example portrays, it was possible to have a liberal revolution without a great debate of ideas, and this was feasible because liberalism is not only a political doctrine but also a constitutional arrangement devised to deal with the practical problems of social complexity. In this sense, events such as the Portuguese revolution of 1820 and Brazil's independence in 1822 cannot be understood without focusing on the wider context of the Luso-Atlantic connections. It was revolution in Europe and the Americas, seafaring, and intellectual communication that made the inception of liberal politics in Portugal possible.

The last chapter of this volume deals with an issue that for generations has disconcerted interpreters of the Iberian world, namely how to understand the creation of nominally liberal institutions in the absence of a recognizably liberal culture. During the nineteenth century, Latin American societies experienced a decided change towards more competitive forms of political integration. These experiences were systematically worded in the language of liberalism. With few exceptions though, Ibero-American liberalism failed to deliver many of the political goods promised by the countless constitutions proclaimed throughout its two centuries of history. Drawing on the Weberian notion of *patrimonialism*, Francisco Colom González maintains that some of these features can be attributed to the social and political conditions of the postcolonial period. But liberal ideas in the region were not an alien transplant. They drew on local experience and on imported ideas filtered through autochthonous intellectual traditions, thereby assuming new social meanings

and political functionality. Spain and its former colonies had to create modern state institutions out of the rubbles of a traditional and multi-ethnic empire. Even if the emancipative function of liberalism was formally alike in both continents, the initial conditions were different. Whereas in Spain liberal constitutionalism could proceed by submitting royal authority to the rule of law, political structures overseas had to be created anew *from below*, by asserting new centres of power over a multiplicity of contending groups and centrifugal regions. In this context, liberal institutions had to adapt to the patronage and praetorian practices that accompanied the erection of weak nation-states in the region. This is why, short of conceiving the liberal discourse in this context as a negligible *flatus vocis*, the gap that separated the theory from the practice can only be conceivably bridged if the political actors were able to perceive in the latter some type of affinity to the normative meanings and social uses of a not too distant colonial past.

The works collected in this volume offer a wide range of perspectives on the multiples dimensions of liberty in regions of the Atlantic world that have been traditionally neglected by the conventional study of political ideas. By emphasizing the comparative aspects of these experiences, their inter-connectedness, and the key role played by the Atlantic cleavage for their theorization, this book helps to reveal the role of this oceanic space as a correlate of the rich and varied regional traditions that converged in the inception of political modernity.