

HILDA SABATO, *Republics of the New World: The Revolutionary Political Experiment in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

This highly illuminating and important book is a timely synthesis of a growing body of research into the everyday practice of republican politics in Spanish America over the half century following independence from Spain. Unfavorable comparisons with the material success and stable democratic politics of the Republic to the North have weighed heavily on both the historiography and the general understanding of Spanish American republics during the Nineteenth Century, much as they preoccupied people in the region at the time. Chronic political instability and economic backwardness were ascribed to ill-suited laws and constitutions borrowed from abroad, selfish propertied elites freed from colonial legal restraints treating states as their personal fiefs, as well as charismatic leaders—"caudillos"—exploiting the gulf between archaic, caste-based societies and an enlightened but cowed urban patriciate, transfixed by the modernity being experienced elsewhere in the North Atlantic world. Hilda Sabato shrugs off such condescending and exoticizing stereotypes and takes the reader directly into the "revolutionary moment" in the aftermath of the French invasion in 1808 when Spanish Americans chose a republican course and found themselves, unwittingly, at the forefront of political modernity.

However much conservatives would later lament the loss of the stability of colonial rule, liberal representative republican government based upon popular sovereignty, the division of powers, legal equality, popular elections at every level from local councils to the president, had been embraced across the region by the early 1820s. At a time when democratic politics was being suppressed, absolutism restored, and monarchy strengthened throughout much of Europe, Spanish Americans chose a republican and, Sabato insists, a revolutionary outcome to the imperial crisis. The book explores the practical consequences of that decision. Although the word Democracy is not mentioned in the text, nor did the concept appear much in republican discourse until midcentury (except in reference to the excesses of the French Revolution), "Government by the People" (p.41), how to constrain or advance it, was present in all the debates relating to political representation and in the laws prescribing how republican ideals should be put into practice.

Skillfully, at times dizzyingly, given the generalization and abstraction required to do justice to such diversity over vast space and time, the book explores the practice of republican politics in three main chapters; "Elections," "Citizens in Arms," and "Public Opinion." Although the focus is unashamedly on the political, a social thread runs through the analysis, with the republican

experiment analyzed within deftly described social, ethnic, and spatial contexts. Less a study of “Republics in the Air,” the title of Rafael Rojas’s account of the onset Spanish American republicanism which focuses on ideas (*Las repúblicas de aire*, 2009), this is more a study of “Republics on the Ground,” the everyday practices of republican politics over the century. In the political lexicon of modern republicanism, elections are the fundamental element and the chapter on “Elections” is the most exhaustive and inventive in the book. Regular popular elections were held everywhere throughout the century with the “principle of distinction” (Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government*, 1997)—that the educated few should represent the many—adhered to mostly by custom than electoral law, which in most republics favored near universal male suffrage. A now substantial literature on elections demonstrates the geographical breadth and social depth of republican sociability and political networks and helps explain the contingency, unpredictability, and inherent instability of competitive republican politics. Few republics dispensed for long with elections and the instability and revolutions they often provoked were considered an inevitable, even a necessary and desirable part of a healthy republican system. Likewise “armed citizenship” from the onset of the independence wars was considered an essential for the defense and advancement of the republican system. Civil Militias and National Guards provided the institutional embodiment of liberal and democratic republican principles, allowing equilibrium to be sought between civic and patriotic duty, conflicts between central, regional, and local power to be balanced, and demands for individual rights and guarantees resulting from historic racial hierarchy and inequality to be accommodated. Revolutions, Sabato insists, were not archaic or retrograde but modern political habits “embedded in republican politics” and part of “the usual repertoire of most political actors” (pp.112-19). Finally, in “Public Opinion” Sabato traces the part played by voluntary associations, the press and the printed word in creating political communities, linking provincial towns with capitals and regions with one another.

Echoing a pattern observed in two recent studies of republicanism and liberalism (James E. Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World*, 2014; Timo H. Schaefer, *Liberalism as Utopia*, 2017), “Republics of the New World” traces a seventy-year arch from the initial decade of utopian idealism, through a period of conservative reaction and disillusion, into the mid-century decades of democratic and republican enthusiasm, before a hardening of democratic arteries and a curtailing of popular elections, armed citizenship, and press freedom—the three markers of Spanish America’s “revolutionary political experiment”—during the last decades of the century.

This is a vigorous, intelligent and persuasive book from a distinguished Argentine historian at the peak of her powers. Established scholars, particularly

those specializing in the contribution of broader social groupings to democratic and republican politics, will value the book. Newcomers to the region will have their preconceptions challenged and be inspired to read further. Students will find valuable bibliographical clues for challenging existing orthodoxy and negative stereotypes about Spanish America's nineteenth-century history of "misrule," "caudillismo," "patrimonialism," and "fictitious democracy."

**Guy Thomson**

*University of Warwick*

RICARDO D. SALVATORE, *La Confederación Argentina y sus subalternos. Integración estatal, política y derechos en el Buenos Aires posindependiente (1820-1860)*. Santiago de Chile: Centro de Investigaciones Diego Barros Arana, 2020.

Ricardo Salvatore's new book appears seventeen years after his *Wandering Paysanos: State Order and Subaltern Experiences in Buenos Aires during the Rosas Era*. The two books correlate closely in subject, focus, and historical period. The regime led by Governor Juan Manuel de Rosas (1829-1852) in the province of Buenos Aires once more marks out the main framework of the analysis; again, the author writes about subordinate groups or "fragments" under Rosas, this time focusing on Blacks, Native Americans, and women by contrast with his previous concern with rural dwellers and military recruits. Salvatore continues to refer to his subjects as "subalterns," a now familiar term originating with Antonio Gramsci and co-opted by Indian postcolonial theorists led by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha. Steering well away from these heady realms, Salvatore writes as a standard historical empiricist of progressive bent. He follows the tradition of "history from below" epitomised by E.P. Thompson, whose *The Making of the English Working Class* was published in 1963. He uses the term "subaltern" conventionally for the most part to denote social and political inferiority, whether self-perceived or imposed. The term is given another meaning when used to refer to groups subject to extraneous, authoritarian "silencing," as in "the silencing of black voices" for example.

Salvatore questions the extent to which the "silencing" of the "subalterns" occurred, as he explores hundreds of cases where it failed. As he demonstrates, the subjects or "fragments" of his book had access to channels enabling interlocations with agents of government. He describes how the Rosas government itself established and maintained the channels of communication; attracting, eliciting, or instilling the support of subalterns became one of the major features of the regime. Its chief objective lay in heading off dissent while helping to ensure