

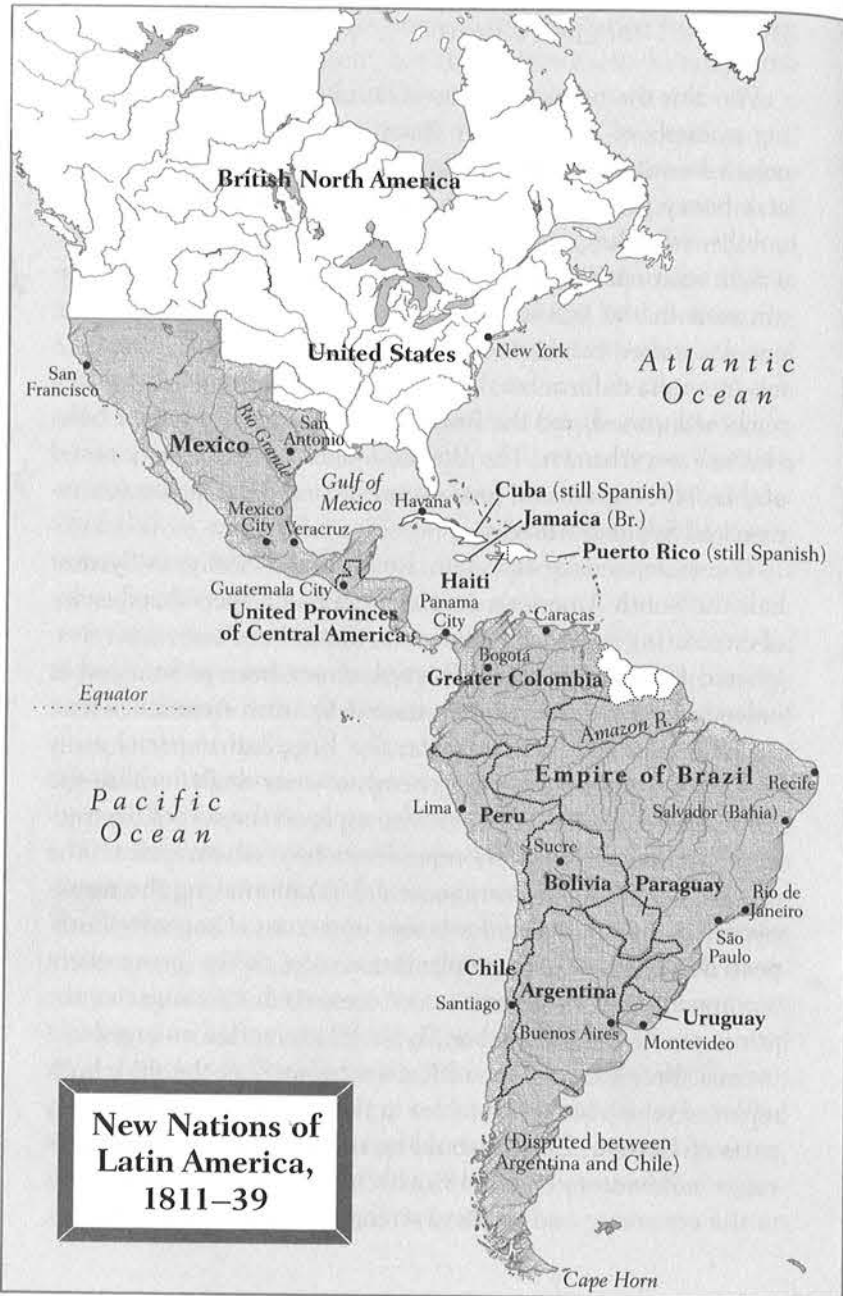
★
★
~~than laws, and toppling governments by revolution became not an exception to the system, but the system itself. Although the efficacy of republican institutions in Latin America stood at a low ebb by the 1840s, few saw an alternative. Constitutions and elections remained essential symbols of popular sovereignty and were rarely eliminated altogether. Rather than measures of majority opinion, elections became contests of force that showed who controlled each locality; the party that got the most ballots into the ballot box—by whatever means—was, by definition, the strongest. Governments frequently manipulated vote counts and used the police to determine the outcomes of elections. Stolen elections often provoked revolutions led by the caudillo of the opposition party. Gradually, most Spanish Americans lost faith in the promise of democracy during these years. Often prevented from voting, the common people rarely spoke for themselves in politics. Most often, “the people” exercised their sovereignty through action in the street.~~

★
 By the middle of the 1800s, most Latin American countries were ruled by conservative caudillos whose sole public service was to maintain order and protect property. Political conflict had completely shaken apart several of the new Spanish American republics. When state or provincial governments gained the upper hand over central governments, federalism often became a first step toward dismemberment. Greater Colombia, as the former viceroyalty of New Granada was called after independence, started as a single republic but split into the present three countries of Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. As mentioned, the original Central American Republic splintered into five parts—Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica—dividing Spanish America into a total of sixteen sovereign political fragments, not counting Spanish-controlled Cuba and Puerto Rico. Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Argentina, and Mexico all seemed headed for further fragmentation in contests between centralists and federalists.

BRAZIL'S DIFFERENT PATH

★
 Was this the necessary price of decolonization? The contrasting example of mid-century Brazil suggests that retention of colonial institutions such as the monarchy lent stability, although at a heavy price. Brazil had retained a European dynasty; a nobility of dukes, counts, and barons sporting coats of arms; a tight relationship between church and state; and a full commitment to the institution of chattel slavery, in which some people worked others to death. On the other hand, despite a few attempts to form breakaway republics, Portuguese America remained united, and the Brazilian government had never been violently overthrown. The Brazilian elite was extremely proud of this achievement and fond of contrasting Brazil to revolution-wracked Spanish America.

The independent Brazilian Empire sprawled grandly over half the South American continent. It had a specialized cadre of circulating provincial governors, not elected but rather designated by Rio. Brazilian society had not been militarized at independence. Unlike the situation in Spanish America, where regional caudillos ran rampant, the Brazilian imperial army was unrivaled in power, its generals unswervingly loyal to the emperor. Brazilian plantations also escaped the sort of destruction that hampered early republican Spanish America. The original heartland of Portuguese colonization along the northeastern coast still boiled down tons upon tons of sugar for European desserts, but a newer plantation crop, coffee (an excellent accompaniment to dessert), now competed with sugar as the prime product of slave labor. By the 1840s, coffee emerged victorious. Brazilian coffee cultivation boomed as the dark brew replaced tea on breakfast tables in the United States and many parts of Europe. Coffee would be to independent Brazil what sugar had been to colonial Brazil. It also contributed directly to the economic and political strength of the imperial capital,



because the coffee boom began in the province of Rio de Janeiro itself.

This Brazilian success story obscures the saga of Brazil's own liberal hopes and disappointments. In fact, liberalism had created a miniature version of the tempestuous Spanish American experience during the first decades of independence. Pedro I fancied himself a liberal, but he had an authoritarian temperament. After consenting to the creation of a constituent assembly in 1822, he impatiently closed it when liberal representatives took the notion of popular sovereignty too seriously for his taste. In practice, Pedro aimed to rule "by the grace of God," not by the permission of the Brazilian people. He convened a few advisors to write a constitution that, he taunted the assembly, would be more liberal than any they could devise. But his 1824 constitution called for a senate appointed for life, and it placed the emperor's so-called moderating power above the other branches of government. True liberals were not fooled, and Pedro's blundering impetuosity—his inflationary policies, his unpopular wars in the south, his scandalous adultery, and, worst of all, his continued involvement in Portuguese politics—gave the advantage to his enemies.

Liberals found their most popular issue in the irritating presence of many Portuguese-born merchants, bureaucrats, and army officers, who still occupied positions of power in independent Brazil. Ordinary Brazilians who cared nothing for political theory identified with cries of "Brazil for the Brazilians." Anti-Portuguese rioting became frequent. Pedro tended to surround himself with Portuguese-born advisors, and he was, after all, Portuguese by birth himself. In addition, his father's death in 1826 made him legal heir to the throne of Portugal. Pedro renounced the Portuguese throne in favor of his daughter but remained deeply engrossed in Portuguese affairs. What if the Crowns of Portugal and Brazil were reunited? Liberals warned of possible recolonization. By early 1831, anti-Portuguese resentment in Rio had reached fever pitch, and Pedro, feeling royally

Plus 15 on 4
An economic
Success story not
political



unappreciated, decided to abdicate the Brazilian Crown and return to Portugal. But, like his father, João VI, Pedro I left his son to take his place in Brazil. Although he was only five years old, the prince, named Pedro after his departing sire, had been born in Brazil. No one questioned his authority. Nevertheless, until he came of age, the child emperor would need adult guardians, called *regents*, to rule in his name.

The *regency* years, 1831–40, were the stormiest in Brazilian history. The regents represented the liberal forces that had unseated the despotic Pedro I. Since they wanted to limit the power of the central government, they reduced the size of the army and gave more authority to local and provincial officials. Very quickly, however, they began to want their power back. The liberal notion that “all men are created equal” (even leaving women and slaves out, as most liberals then did) contradicted the powerfully hierarchical social organization of Brazil. Most of the time, equality remained an abstract concept, a pretty lie, a rhetorical gambit. Like Spanish American liberals during the wars of independence, Brazilian liberals now needed allies among the common folk, and they took a similar tack. Exalting the importance of native Brazilian birth and invoking the menace of Portuguese recolonization, liberals in a number of provinces rebelled against the central government, which they thought too timid by half. By the late 1830s, liberal rebellions raged simultaneously in four provinces, from far north to far south, and these were not the last. Ephemeral republics were declared. Slaves were getting involved here and there. The regents panicked.

Liberals among the imperial elite now did an abrupt about-face. Maybe the conservatives had been right, they admitted. Maybe Brazil needed strong royal authority more than democracy. Decolonization was put on hold. In 1840, even though Prince Pedro was still only fourteen, the national assembly voted to put him on the throne anyway. It canceled earlier

liberal reforms, built up the imperial army, and instituted a centralized national police force. Liberalism had failed, and the conservative Brazilian success story of the mid-1800s—slaves, coffee, and monarchical stability—could now be told.

CONTINUITIES IN DAILY LIFE

Whatever the political alterations after independence, the texture of people's daily lives—their work, their families and other social relationships, their amusements and beliefs—changed less than one might think. The great economic engine of transformation that would eventually touch everyone, capitalism, was still idling spasmodically in most countries (for reasons already explained) and would not roar to life until after 1850. In the meantime, however, things were not so bad for most Latin Americans.

Indigenous people farmed communal lands belonging to their villages, relatively unmolested by outsiders. During the period 1825–50, the economic slowdown took pressure off indigenous land and labor. Colonial labor drafts such as the *mita* had ended—except in extraordinarily backward cases—and indigenous people preferred, whenever possible, to avoid wage labor and grow their own food. Especially in Mexico, where indigenous villages had governed themselves through Spanish institutions since the 1500s, village elders administered their own communities, giving them an independent voice in political matters. But most indigenous people cared little for republican politics. They wanted to live apart, observing their own customs, speaking their own language, and generally minding their own business.

In some cases—Colombia, for example—free peasants of mixed blood far outnumbered the inhabitants of indigenous communities. Sometimes, rural people lived as “attached workers,” called *peons*, on the property of a large landowner and

Pedro I
abdicates
★

Regency
years &
rebellion

★
Pedro II

embraced the international culture available through writing and education. His favorite book, which he studied as fervently as any Philadelphian or Bostonian, was the *Autobiography* of Benjamin Franklin. In Chile, where he lived for much of the 1830s and 1840s, Sarmiento worked as a teacher, a clerk, a mine foreman, and a newspaper editor before becoming engaged in the organization of Chilean public schools. He studied English at night and practiced it by translating the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Sarmiento personally created the first spelling book and the first teacher-training institute in Chile, and he traveled to the United States and Europe to study education techniques. When Mitre became president, Sarmiento returned to the United States as his diplomatic representative. In 1868, he succeeded Mitre as president—elected, in fact, while in the United States—and stepped off the ship in Buenos Aires with ten Bostonian women whom he put in charge of teacher training in each of Argentina's ten provinces.

Argentina's liberal rulers uniformly promoted public education, but Sarmiento most of all. School enrollment almost doubled during his presidential term. Nearly a hundred public libraries were created. And Sarmiento, in turn, chose his minister of education to be the next president. In addition, liberal efforts to promote immigration had succeeded. Immigrants were arriving from Europe by the hundreds of thousands. European culture and European people would transform Buenos Aires into a city more reminiscent of Milan or Paris than of Caracas or Lima.

Turning toward European models, especially English and French ones, the liberals rejected traditional Argentine culture, particularly rural culture, as unbearably "barbaric." They rejected non-European racial heritage, too. Country people like the gauchos often had indigenous and African, as well as European, ancestry. Liberals considered race mixture a disgrace. Leading scientific theories of the 1800s advanced racist

today it's
more
European by
percentage
than London
& Paris

premises. Like it or not, that was Progress, according to the best experts of the day. And, like it or not, most Latin American countries had a lot of race mixing, as we have seen. Here was the "national tragedy" faced by so many Eurocentric liberals. How would they handle it?

Disappointingly, Sarmiento, the great educator, also embodies the darker side of Latin American liberalism in his thinking on race. Sarmiento was the first of many Argentines to make a literary reputation writing about gauchos. In his famous descriptions, gauchos are dangerous characters, capable of incredible exploits but, like awe-inspiring dinosaurs, clearly doomed to extinction. In 1861, Sarmiento wrote chilling words in a letter to Mitre, words justifying harsh measures against the followers of a rebellious backland caudillo: "Do not try to economize the blood of gauchos. It is fertilizer [like the blood of animals from the slaughterhouse] that must be made useful to the country. Their blood is the only part of them that is human." In truth, Sarmiento had little faith in the mass of the Argentine people. His government maintained rigged elections as a standard feature of politics in liberal Argentina.

Brazil had its own, typically Brazilian, problems with liberalism. It was still a monarchy and still a slave-owning society, two obvious contradictions to liberal thinking. Brazil also had a large free population of African and mixed descent that made up-to-date liberals, influenced by European "scientific racism," shake their heads sadly, as if announcing a terminal illness for the entire country. If Brazil could go liberal, anywhere could.

As often happens, war became a catalyst for change. The Triple Alliance War of 1865–70 was the most terrible ever fought in South America. It was a fiasco even for the winners—Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay—and wreaked utter devastation on the loser, Paraguay. Ruled by Francisco Solano López, a dictator whom many believed insane, Paraguay had acquired a powerful army and maintained its standoffish attitude toward

→ I love how this is a model of all that the 19th-century South needed

Brazil

★ Triple Alliance War

the outside world. Convinced that Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil menaced his outlet to the sea through the Río de la Plata, López attacked first. The allies fought ostensibly in self-defense, supposedly to topple the dictator, but they also sought commercial, strategic, and territorial advantage. The armies of this war wore uniforms and used weapons like those of the contemporaneous US Civil War. Death tolls were similarly high. In a series of bloody battles, the allies ground the Paraguayans to a pulp. Paraguay's adult male population practically vanished in the war. Brazil and Argentina both gained land at Paraguayan expense. But the war also generated a national mood of disillusionment in Brazil.

The Brazilian Empire had called up hundreds of thousands of volunteers to fight Paraguayan "tyranny" in the name of Civilization. The whole Brazilian nation, more or less, had been enlisted rhetorically in a liberal cause—a cause heartily approved in Europe, particularly by the British, who hoped to gain better trade access to Paraguay. But victory over that small Spanish American republic had come so slowly, and at such a cost, as to call Brazil's supposedly superior Civilization into question. And for many Brazilians, a crusade against Paraguayan "tyranny" rang hollow in the presence of Brazilian slavery. When the war began, slavery had recently been abolished in the United States, making Brazil and Spanish-held Cuba the last slave-holding societies in the Americas. Free blacks, and even some slaves in search of their freedom, joined the ranks of Brazil's Patriotic Volunteers, who marched off, brass bands playing, to fight in Paraguay. The contradiction was too obvious.

After a generation of lethargy, Brazilian liberalism began to recover its voice during the war. Brazilian conservatives had gained decisive dominance back in the 1840s, as the reader may recall. Liberal ideas, ran the comfortable mid-century consensus among Brazil's ruling class, were simply too advanced for

Brazilian society, a society founded on slavery and hierarchy. Reluctantly—and their disappointment was real or not, depending on the person—elite Brazilians had resigned themselves to a life of privilege in an admittedly "backward" country, one not yet ready for democracy. Emperor Pedro II, now grown into a tall, thick-bearded man, said such things for the record.

Pedro II seems genuinely to have believed—and genuinely to have regretted—Brazil's supposed unreadiness to do without him. An emperor more unlike his impetuous father is hard to imagine. Pedro II was a soft-spoken, studious man who dressed in somber suits like an English banker. As monarch, he took his responsibilities seriously and worked hard at them, exercising considerable, but not absolute, power. He could name provincial governors, cabinet ministers, senators-for-life, and members of the imperial nobility. He could dissolve the national assembly and call new elections at will.

Although his personal style was conservative, Pedro II was a philosophical liberal who endorsed neither of Brazil's two parties, Conservative or Liberal, but held an unshakable faith in science, innovation, and Progress. If he were not an emperor, it was said, he would have been a schoolteacher. He traveled extensively in Europe and the United States, where he talked to scientists such as Louis Pasteur, philosophers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, novelists such as Victor Hugo, and inventors such as Alexander Graham Bell. Pedro II hoped aloud that Brazil would one day need neither a monarchy nor a slave-labor system, and he freed his own slaves in 1840. When republicans, explicitly proposing to end the monarchy, reappeared on the Brazilian political scene years later, Pedro went so far as to make a leading republican intellectual his grandson's personal tutor.

Like their emperor, the Brazilian elite endorsed liberalism in principle while embracing conservatism in practice. Then, in the 1860s, times began to change in Brazil as elsewhere. A number

of conservative leaders, convinced of the need for reform—and thinking especially of slavery—broke ranks and joined the liberals. Then a liberal prime minister clashed with Brazil's conservative military commander during the Triple Alliance War, and Pedro sided with the commander, infuriating the liberals. A liberal manifesto of 1869 called for reform of the imperial system, to make it more democratic, and for the gradual emancipation of the slaves. The document ended with the threat: "Reform or Revolution!" An even more radical liberal group issued a second manifesto the same year, demanding limitations on the emperor's power and immediate abolition of slavery. In 1870, a third manifesto also called for the end of slavery and, further, for the emperor's ouster and the creation of a Brazilian republic. Something had to give.

In 1871, the conservative government caved in to liberal pressure and enacted a "free birth" law: Slaves would remain slaves, but their children would be born free. Because the slave trade had stopped around 1850, the "free birth" law signaled a public commitment to end slavery sooner or later. Pedro II was pleased. But the last years of the trade in the 1830s and 1840s had brought hundreds of thousands of young Africans to Brazil, ensuring that slavery would last for decades. In the meantime, children born officially "free" were still required to work until adulthood for their mother's owner.

Although Brazilian conservatives ruled through most of the 1870s and 1880s, Progress gradually conquered hearts and minds. The more progressive coffee growers (those of São Paulo) began to attract and employ Italian immigrant agricultural workers. Bit by bit, the coffee-export economy fueled the growth of cities. And urban Brazilians—better educated, more cosmopolitan, and not directly connected to plantation life—were more likely to be persuaded by the liberal vision of Progress. The signers of the above-mentioned republican manifesto of 1870, for example, included ten journalists, thirteen engineers

and merchants, and twenty-three doctors of law or medicine, but only one self-described planter.

In the 1880s, slavery again became a contentious political issue. The leading abolitionist spokesman was now a liberal named Joaquim Nabuco. Nabuco became a popular celebrity whose image appeared on cigar and beer labels. Even Rio de Janeiro's carnival paraders took up abolitionist themes. Nabuco and the other abolitionists of the 1880s spoke moral truths about slavery but condemned it, most of all, as an obstacle to Progress. Unquestionably, slavery *was* a thing of the past. After 1886, when the Spanish abolished slavery in Cuba, progressive Brazilians bore the international shame alone. By this time, some provinces without coffee had already freed the slaves, and on profitable coffee plantations, slaves had begun to run away in the thousands. Finally, overwhelming public pressure forced total abolition without financial compensation to the former slave owners. Pedro was in Europe, so his daughter Princess Isabel, herself an abolitionist, signed the "Golden Law" of freedom in 1888. Four centuries of American slavery were over at long last.

The next year, another outmoded institution, the Brazilian monarchy itself, collapsed, its day over too. Abolition had offended formerly stalwart monarchists, and change was in the air. Ranking army officers had grievances against the imperial government, and republican militants saw their chance. Always weak electorally, the republicans had strong influence in the army. Benjamin Constant Botelho de Magalhães, the emperor's grandson's republican tutor, mentioned earlier, became a celebrated professor at Brazil's military academy, where he channeled the military discontent and linked it to republicanism. In November 1889, the military proclaimed a republic. Pedro and his family quietly left for Europe while telegraph wires carried the news across the country, provoking astonishment but also immediate acceptance. Brazilians unanimously bowed to "the

Free birth law—beginning of the end of slavery

Brazilian monarchy falls

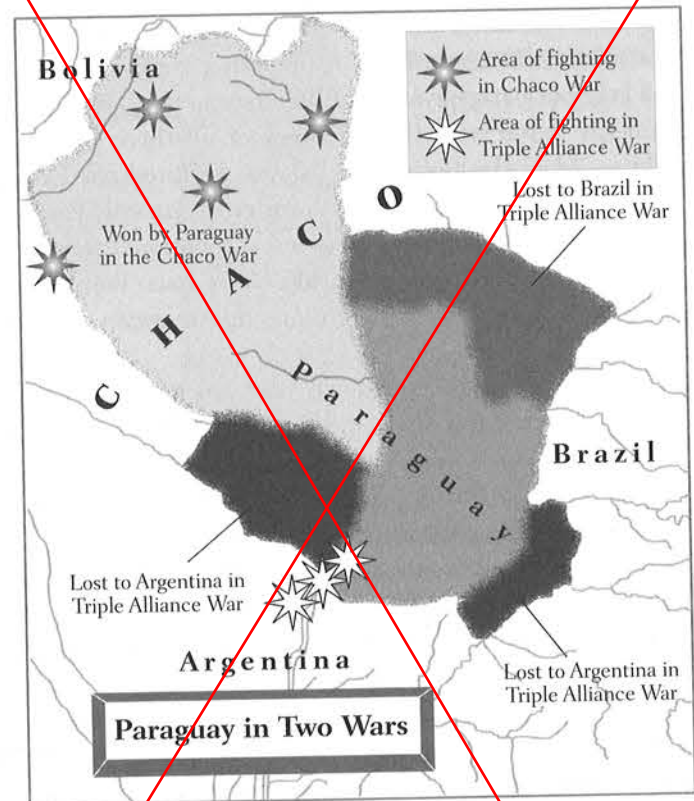
Slavery abolished in U.S. & Cuba

End of slavery in Brazil & the Americas

inevitable march of Progress," as if they had understood long ago that the emperor had to go but had been too polite to say so.

By century's end, liberalism served, in one form or another, as the official ideology of every Latin American country. A powerful consensus reigned among the region's ruling classes, seconded by its urban middle classes. A long period of stable liberal hegemony at last emerged. Progress, after the model of England or France or the US, was the order of the day.

COUNTERCURRENTS: International Wars



Only a handful of large wars have been fought between Latin American nations. Yet wars have had a powerful effect on the combatant countries. Mexico lost vast territory in its war with the United States (1846-48). The Triple Alliance War (1865-70) gave Brazil a national shock treatment, consolidated the Argentine national state, and virtually liquidated poor