

““The Fight Is Between the Colonial System and the Modern Liberal Spirit:” Contesting Order, Liberty and Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Colombia and Mexico”

While most of the nineteenth-century world's republics were in Latin America, the lack of “order” in those states has long been used to discredit their democratic and republican experiments as simply republican façades. However, around mid-century in Colombia and Mexico, many Liberals, both elite and popular, did not fetishize order, but assumed some disorder was necessary to vanquish the old colonial system in order to remake their societies as democratic republics (which they envisioned as defining modernity). Popular groups especially were imagining a new type of social citizenship; for these democratic revolutions to succeed, some disorder and violence might be tolerated or even necessary. Certainly, toward the end of the century Conservatives and many Liberals were very successful in positing that the disorder of unruly plebeians demanding rights and social citizenship had made their republics untenable. Indeed, some popular groups, threatened by fears of popular violence, eagerly supported this reactionary turn. However, this “disorder” was not a sign of failure, but, rather, really showed how strong a democratic political culture had been in Latin America.