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Review of Scott Eastman and Natalia Perea Sobrevilla, eds., *The Rise of Constitutional Government in the Iberian Atlantic World: The Impact of the Cadiz Constitution of 1812*

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Eastman, Scott and Sobrevilla Perea, Natalia, (eds.). *The Rise of Constitutional Government in the Iberian Atlantic World: The Impact of the Cádiz Constitution of 1812*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015. 320 pp.

Histories of constitution writing tend to be elaborated in nationalist frameworks, but Spain and Spanish America's first great experiment with constitutionalism occurred in an imperial context, during the 1810–1812 Cortes de Cádiz. In March of 1812, while Napoleon's brother Joseph sat on the throne of Spain and armies of France occupied much of the country, legislators elected from Spain and America met in Cádiz to debate the future of Spain's global monarchy. There, a provisional government drafted and adopted the first liberal constitution in the Hispanic World, a document that became known as the Cádiz Constitution of 1812. This constitution was promulgated and implemented in much of Spain and Spanish America during the chaos of the independence wars, between 1812 and 1814, 1820 and 1823, and also briefly in 1836–7.

In this essay collection, specialists in Iberian American social and political history collectively rethink the Constitution of Cádiz in an Atlantic framework. In so doing, they draw attention to the enduring impact of the document on the history of state building, elections, and municipal governance of Iberian America, as well as on national identities, citizenship, and the development of ideas about race and gender. They also reverse a historiographical trend that focuses on the Juntas and constitutional experiments of the early American republics. Instead, this volume emphasizes the influence on the political culture of Iberian America of the extraordinary debates conducted at Cádiz. While scholars such as Francois–Xavier Guerra have drawn attention to the importance of Cádiz for the Americas, no volume has yet sought to explore and compare its impacts over such a large geographic and chronological scope. As much a call for further research as a definitive statement, this volume makes a welcome and necessary contribution to political history from below on both sides of the Atlantic.

Like all constitutions, the Constitution of 1812 was a contradictory document. It mixed progressive, modernizing elements, such as the inclusion of American delegates on equal footing as Spaniards and the granting of citizenship to Indians, with traditional elements of the Spain's Catholic monarchy. It also codified tremendous exclusions. Most famously, it denied people of African descent (the *castas*) rights of voting or citizenship and refused to recognize them in population counts that determined representation. Doing so strategically blocked Americans from achieving a majority over Spaniards in the Cortes. This dual legacy of political expansion and exclusion would have wide-ranging effects in the Americas.

Given the extraordinary social diversity and complexity of Spain's American territories, the case studies in this volume — New Spain, Central America, Cuba, Spanish Florida, Peru, New Granada, and the Río de la Plata —

demonstrate the tremendous variety of responses to the Constitution of 1812 and the importance of local social and political dynamics in conditioning responses. Jordana Dym's chapter on Central America uses fresh archival evidence to illuminate how the Central American elites' involvement in Cádiz had a mixed impact on the region, by contributing to the processes of constitution making and representation, but also territorial fragmentation. As chapters by David Sartorius, Marcela Echeverri, Rafael Marquese, and Tâmis Parron confirm, Cádiz elicited contradictory responses, often the opposite of what one might expect. For example, Indians in Cuba refused to accept the Constitution out of fear that citizenship and equal status with Hispanic whites would lose for them ancient privileges associated with *pueblo* status. Despite its failure to recognize the citizenship and voting rights of people of African origins, free people of color throughout the Americas did not always perceive the Constitution as obstructing their political aspirations. Cuban slaveholders, in turn, interpreted the Cádiz Constitution as an antislavery document, even though they had effectively blocked from the final draft any mention of the transatlantic slave trade or the gradual emancipation of slaves. These seemingly contradictory responses remind us that local conditions and understandings remained the arbiters of political transformation during this interconnected age of revolutions.

In sum, this volume argues convincingly for the need to pay greater attention to the Constitution of 1812 as a framework for understanding the transitions of imperial Spain throughout the eighteenth century. As Eastman and Perea suggest in their conclusion, the early nineteenth century in Spain and Spanish America needs to be conceived not only as the age of Latin American independence movements, but also of revolution, liberalism, and the rise of constitutional governments in the revolutionary Iberian Atlantic world.

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