

John Maher, ed. *Francisco de Miranda: Exile and Enlightenment*. London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2006. 124 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-900039-54-3.

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## Francisco de Miranda: A Picture of an Age, a Portrait of a Social Class

This multi-authored biography of the Venezuelan revolutionary leader Francisco de Miranda enables historians to peer into the public and private life not only of a single man but also of a class, the creole Hispanic American elites, whose role in the independence process at the beginning of nineteenth century would be decisive. The collection of articles—by David Bushnell, John Lynch, John Maher, Edgardo Mondolfi Gudat, and Karen Racine, and edited by John Maher—opens up this interesting possibility by approaching Miranda’s personality and his engagement with Hispanic American emancipation. It offers the readers penetrating insights into the cultural and political habits of both a time—the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century—and a social group. Travel as a cultural experience, intellectual and political networks woven with celebrated European and North American characters, debates on institutional models, and education in its most varied aspects, are the topics the authors use to insert the personal trajectory of Miranda into an Atlantic scenario.

David Bushnell’s chapter addresses one of the major issues of political historiography on revolutionary Hispanic America: the function of North Atlantic world institutional models in the constitution of a new political culture in South American countries. Miranda, similar to many other Hispanic American revolutionary leaders, had to deal with the problem of building an order that could replace the colonial one. To do so, he undertook the analysis and adaptation of foreign models to local circumstances. Bushnell clearly shows that Anglo-Saxon models—the British and the North-

American constitutions—were held in the highest regard by Miranda, a respect that many later South American politicians continued to offer and that many historians have identified. As Bushnell states, Miranda was conscious of the differences between North and South America and inclined to adopt a monarchical system similar to the British one. Nevertheless, there was a similarity between Miranda and late eighteenth-century North Americans: the Ancient Roman Republic, whose institutions, as Bushnell says, were familiar to both. It is here that Bushnell’s approach lays down a guideline for further studies on Latin American political thought and practices in the early nineteenth century: the meaning of republicanism and the extent to which this concept was used to encourage different, and even contradictory, projects. The question of how the tradition of classical republicanism was revived during the eighteenth century—which the Anglo-Saxon historiography has frequently faced—remains scarcely explored by Latin American historiography. And in this sense, Bushnell provides a very instructive example, since he goes further back to the Roman roots of both the North American and the British models to see how Miranda fits within this Roman tradition as well.

John Lynch’s work shows the Atlantic dimensions of Miranda’s commitments and projects in the political and intellectual networks he set up during his European exile. Lynch vividly depicts a character fully acquainted with the dynamics of European politics and firmly determined to use this “know-how” to enhance the independence of Spain’s South American colonies. Miranda

knew how alliances worked, who he could press successfully and when, and whose European exile. Lynch vividly depicts a character fully acquainted with the dynamics of European politics and firmly determined to use this “know-how” to enhance the independence of Spain’s South American colonies. Miranda knew how alliances worked, who he could press successfully and when, and whose support was crucial to put Hispanic American emancipation on the European political agenda. Traveling; maintaining contacts with journalists and newspaper editors; and cultivating the friendship of merchants, politicians, and philosophers, were key components of Miranda’s strategy—a strategy that was later adopted by Hispanic American revolutionary leaders. Although Miranda failed to engage the British government in the enterprise of Hispanic American emancipation, the achievements that Lynch highlights exhibit the sign of the times. Specifically, they place Hispanic America and its independence on the map of the political debate and in the focus of the “thinking part” of the British public (p. 49), which was meant to draw the attention of public opinion, the new political actor consolidated in the course of the second half of the eighteenth century.

That Miranda’s personality expressed the spirit of the times is a topic that Edgardo Mondolfi Gudat explores from the original perspective of Miranda’s interest in music, an approach that deals with cultural practices of the late eighteenth century that have not been frequently studied in connection with Latin America’s revolutionary leaders. A second important element of the author’s study is the importance of theater as a vehicle of sociability that helped Miranda forge links with members of the upper classes, politicians, and thinkers. Largely through Miranda’s diary entries, Mondolfi Gudat shows how musical training was part of the quest for knowledge and experience that Miranda pursued in his European travels. Musical knowledge was a mark of distinction for the cultivated and gallant enlightened man Miranda endeavored to become, and his acquaintance with luminaries, including Franz Joseph Haydn and Thomas Glück, enabled him to create that image. This article traces how, through Miranda’s musical and artistic inclinations, “the most cosmopolitan of all the Hispanic Americans” could make visible to Europe “a world struggling to come into its own in the universal order of nations” (pp. 75-76).

But, if Hispanic America was to be independent, it needed to take the path of war. Therefore, military instruction was essential for a man that had set himself such ambitious goals. Malcolm Deas analyzes the main traits of the soldier Francisco de Miranda, who served

in the French army, describing a political and military itinerary that illuminates the context of Hispanic Americans’ insertion in European societies. The fact that many South American revolutionary leaders, including Argentine general José de San Martín and Chilean politician Bernardo de O’Higgins, had received previous military instruction in Europe shows the opportunities of social and political promotion for the members of the creole élites: after the collapse of the colonial order, that military experience became decisive to make progress in a revolutionary career. Like San Martín and O’Higgins, Miranda was a freemason, and his participation in the European wars was impregnated by freemasonry values and culture. Maybe this was why he gave the impression of being a mixture of “philosophe et républicain” (p. 85), as General Dumuriez said about him. Deas offers an astute explanation for Miranda’s failure when commanding the patriotic troops at Venezuela; he identifies a military style more suitable to the Old Regime than to the epoch opened by Hispanic American revolutions, when recruitment of military forces required demagoguery, an art which he lacked.

What is far from being a feature of the Old Regime mindset is Miranda’s attitude towards women. Approaches to Miranda’s relations with women have usually emphasized his “Casanova” image, but Karen Racine, while acknowledging this conventional view, examines Miranda’s relations with women as part of his operation within an Enlightenment atmosphere. Following Robert Darnton, Racine suggests that the enlightened disposition to challenge authority and act freely in the public sphere was accompanied, in the realm of private life, by a free inclination towards sexual intercourse (p. 90). Moreover, Racine suggests that for Miranda the eighteenth-century ideal of equality included women’s intellectual conditions and political rights (p. 94). Going beyond the revolutionary’s personal relations with women, Racine analyzes an additional facet of Miranda’s behavior that is also quite typical of his generation: the consideration of women as valuable political allies. The strategy of gaining the support of wives and daughters of influential men would be common among the Hispanic American revolutionaries who, some years later, traveled to Europe and the United States to gain recognition for their independent governments. In the end, what Racine shows is a man caught between two centuries and two cultures, who advocated “full political rights for women as a logical extension of the concept of liberty itself,” yet, when he finally settled into married life, “did not entirely escape the desire to be dominant” (p. 114).

To summarize, these five articles compose a delightful and interesting book that, via different aspects of Miranda's life and personality, allow the reader to become acquainted not only with the ups and downs of his constant struggle for Hispanic American emancipation, but with the political and cultural dynamics of the Atlantic World at the turn of the eighteenth century. It would be a good choice for upper division undergraduate and graduate courses given its wealth of examples of how multiple analytical approaches to the biography of important historical figures can illustrate the imagery of an epoch and the life-style a social group. The book will also in-

terest scholars of Spanish American revolutions and of the cultural history of the courses given its wealth of examples of how multiple analytical approaches to the biography of important historical figures can illustrate the imagery of an epoch and the life-style a social group. The book will also interest scholars of Spanish American revolutions and of the cultural history of the European and American revolutionary periods, since the essays show how the circulation of ideas, peoples, habits, and fashions operated in societies experiencing the process of dissolution of Old Regime structures.

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