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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Peter Blanchard. *Under the Flags of Freedom: Slave Soldiers and the Wars of Independence in Spanish South America.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008. ix + 242 pp. $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8229-4347-1; $26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8229-5992-2.

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Published on H-LatAm (May, 2011)
Commissioned by Dennis R. Hidalgo

Breaking the Chains by Bearing Arms

In *Under the Flags of Freedom*, Peter Blanchard highlights the pivotal role played by slave recruits in both Spanish South America's nineteenth-century independence struggles and the changing racial dynamics of the continent's nascent nations-states. To tell this story on the scale of an entire continent, the author draws on correspondence, court cases, and military records from national and provincial archives in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, England, Peru, Spain, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Blanchard concludes that slaves fought on both sides of the independence wars in large numbers to secure their freedom, acquire agency, and improve their lot in life. Spanish American independence leaders balanced their need for manpower with the desire to protect the property rights of slaveholders and retain their support. Yet despite slave soldiers' exemplary military records and success in securing their own freedom, the institution of slavery continued, albeit in a crippled capacity, for another generation after independence.

The book's introductory chapter stresses that with the outbreak of the independence struggles, slaves joined small fighting forces on both sides by the thousands. Blanchard introduces a fundamental paradox of the South American anticolonial wars: the need for slaves as pliant bodies on the firing lines, but also the fear of the social chaos that might come from slave uprisings or the complete destruction of slavery.

Four successive narrative chapters discuss Venezuela and New Granada, Río de la Plata, Chile, and Peru in roughly chronological order as fighting moved through these theaters. In chapter 2, the author portrays both rebels and royalists as initially hesitant toward military service by men of color in Venezuela and New Granada. At the commencement of conflict, enlisting in loyalist forces often offered greater benefits for slaves than fighting for the insurgents. Rebel leaders, many of whom were slaveholders themselves, were deeply divided over whether to bring slaves into their ranks. The reluctance of slaves in Venezuela to join the independence movement contrasted to their enthusiastic support of it in the Río de la Plata region covered in chapter 3. Weaker Spanish forces in Río de la Plata, along with the rebels' more conscientious efforts to recruit slaves, provided a greater incentive for slaves to toss their lots with the insurgents. Blanchard's work returns to northern South America in chapter 4 to discuss the increasing importance of slave recruits as the war dragged on. The improving strategic position of the rebels convinced many royalist slave soldiers to change sides. Chapter 5 turns to Chile and Peru where smaller numbers of slaves lessened the need to recruit them. Most Chilean slaves who fought did so for the patriot forces. In Peru, by contrast, a long history of racial strife, heightened by the memory of the Tupac Amaru and Tupac Katari revolts, made local whites fearful of Afro-Peruvians bearing arms.

Blanchard follows this survey through the wars with two chapters highlighting the experiences of slave soldiers and slave women over the course of the independence conflicts. Slaves used army enlistment as a means to run away, secure wages and regular meals, and eventually safeguard their freedom. Despite the hazards of military campaigns, Blanchard argues, "recruiting had unleashed a veritable wave of slave activism" (p. 140). With regard to slave women's experiences during the independence period, Blanchard believes that the triple obstacles of race, gender, and legal status made ties to the military vital to female empowerment. Many slave women served as nurses, spies, cooks, and servants for the armies. They employed these connections and an understanding of the legal system to secure their freedom and keep their families intact.

The final chapter of *Under the Flags of Freedom* under-

scores that even though military service of the enslaved played a large part in the outcome of the campaigns, it did not end slavery in the newly independent South American nations. To explain this longevity, the author points to the anxieties of potential post-abolition racial strife propagated by the elite. Additionally, slavery endured because former slave recruits were more concerned with the immediate needs of protecting their own personal freedom and avoiding abject poverty than coalescing into a political force.Blanchard has written a highly accessible work that will be of use in classrooms to examine the social histories of the independence struggle, slavery, and abolition. The book's diverse archival research and territorial scope are impressive. This monograph thoughtfully explains the ambivalence of Latin American elites to slave recruitment and charts the change in these attitudes over time. Profiles of Simón Bolívar's and José de San Martín's uncertainties on this subject are particularly instructive.

Blanchard's work does have its shortcomings. Several reviews of this monograph have noted its failure to delve into slaves' understandings of freedom.[1] Along these lines, this review finds Blanchard's explanation for how slaves chose their allegiances underdeveloped. Too often, the author chalks up slaves' decisions to opportunism and calculations of which side had the greatest chance of winning. More complex discussion of slaves' underlying political and ideological loyalties, as in María Elena Díaz's *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre: Negotiating Freedom in Colonial Cuba, 1670-1780* (2000) and Herman L. Bennett's *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640* (2003), would have produced a more nuanced understanding of the recruitment process. Blanchard's final chapter on the aftermath of slave recruitment also gives short shrift to the fates of slave combatants on the royalist side, noting only that "blacks on the patriot side seemed unlikely to intervene on behalf of those who had fought against them" (p. 170).

These interpretive issues do not, on the whole, mar Blanchard's ambitious contribution to a blind spot in the historiography of Latin American slavery and abolition. In the three years since its publication, numerous authors have cited *Under the Flags of Freedom* as the authoritative source for slave participation in South America's anti-colonial wars.[2] For scholars, the work will serve as a gateway and archival glossary for future research on this under-explored topic.

Notes

[1]. James E. Sanders, review of *Under the Flags of Freedom: Slave Soldiers and the Wars of Independence in Spanish South America*, by Peter Blanchard, *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 2 (April 2009): 459-460; and Jeff Shantz, review of *Under the Flags of Freedom: Slave Soldiers and the Wars of Independence in Spanish South America*, by Peter Blanchard, *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 14, no. 2 (November 2009): 506-508.

[2]. George Reid Andrews, "Afro-World: African-Diaspora Thought and Practice in Montevideo, Uruguay, 1830-2000," *The Americas* 67, no. 1 (July 2010): 88, 108; and Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, "Politics and Ideas of Latin American Independence," *Latin American Research Review* 45, no. 2 (2010): 228-235.

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Citation: Jesse Cromwell. Review of Blanchard, Peter, *Under the Flags of Freedom: Slave Soldiers and the Wars of Independence in Spanish South America.* H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. May, 2011.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=31743

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