

the questions that had been discussed by the RHIN(e) network? The editors, in a way, even apologize for only giving a few general and preliminary observations. Unfortunately, the introduction lists the contribution by Christopher Kobrack in the wrong section of the book.

Besides some critical remarks the volume offers rich insights into a field and a topic of (economic) historical research that has been understudied for quite a long time. Therefore, the book is highly recommended.

**Hilda Sabato: Republics of the New World. The Revolutionary Political Experiment in Nineteenth-Century Latin America, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2018, 240 p.**

Reviewed by  
Federica Morelli, Turin

A specialist of the nineteenth-century political history of Argentina, Hilda Sabato offers a valuable and necessary synthetic study of republicanism in nineteenth-century Latin America. This highly readable and accessible volume – full of examples and scarce in footnotes – is suitable for readers who are not necessarily specialists of this particular area and for undergraduates. However, its contributions can equally be useful for those who pursue research on this subject. The author's main objective is explaining the establishment of the republican order as the result of a

historical process – the “republican experiment” as she defines it – rather than the application of an intellectual tradition on republicanism. It is not a book on political philosophy, but on the political and social history of nineteenth-century Latin America. Actually, Sabato's volume focuses on mainland Spanish America in the first fifty years after independence, when a common republican pattern developed and prevailed from the 1820s to the 1870s. Therefore, the Caribbean and Brazil are largely neglected.

For a long period, scholars have considered the pervasive volatility of nineteenth-century Spanish American politics as a symptom of the “failed” modernization of the new polities. The narrative of postcolonial failure belongs to a traditional story, according to which the Global South plays either the laggard or the victim to the historical leadership provided by Europe and the United States. The narrative also has a homegrown, Latin American genealogy that goes back to the end of the nineteenth century when oligarchic governments and their supporters found it convenient to discredit the republican experiments they had recently replaced or abandoned. In recent years, however, historians have been leaving behind the teleological perspectives that informed those views and, rather than try to detect obstacles presumably impeding the road to progress, they now explore how politics actually functioned. No longer considered as an exception, Latin American political history is understood in its own terms and part of the wider history of the republic. Nevertheless, both the master narratives of nineteenth-century Latin America and general world histories do not reflect this

historiographical revolution: they still tend to see nineteenth-century Latin American republicanism as merely a façade masking corruption, fraud, and caudillos serving elite interests.<sup>1</sup> Sabato's book succeeds in replacing this older master narrative with a new story in which Latin America's nineteenth-century republics are exciting, often successful experiments in creating new political cultures and practices.

The book is divided in five chapters. Sabato's starting point in the first chapter is the adoption of the principle of popular sovereignty during the independence era and the two problems this engendered: how to legitimize a new political authority and how to define the territorial limits of the new polities. She then explores three fields of practice in which popular sovereignty came to be exercised and contested in postcolonial Latin America: elections, armed citizenship, and public opinion. These three dimensions are analysed in the following three chapters.

Elections, explored in chapter two, had long been ignored, dismissed as meaningless fraudulent pantomimes. Yet, in comparison to nineteenth-century standards, the franchise in Latin America was impressively wide: in most places, all free, nondependent, adult men were enfranchised. Although not all potential voters actually attended the polls, those who did came from a wide social spectrum. Male workers, as well as native and free black people, were able to cast their votes while in Europe or in the United States they were kept from the urns by property or racial restrictions. Sabato carefully reviews how elections worked, the purposes they served, and how they mediated between elite and popular groups. Furthermore,

she notes that concerning suffrage rights, participation rates, contested outcomes, fraud, and machine politics, there were more similarities than differences with the United States and Europe.

As the ultimate source of power, the people were not only in charge of electing governments, but also of controlling them regularly. This control rested mainly in the hands of public opinion, on the one hand, and the citizens in arms, on the other. As guardians of popular sovereignty, citizens had the right and the obligation to defend freedom and to bear arms in the face of any abuses of power. This exercise was channelled through the institutions of militias, separate from professional army, analysed in chapter three. It intervened in times of elections and performed important functions in the civic rituals of the republic. Above all, it was a decisive player in the revolutions that became a regular and frequent means to challenge the existing authorities on the charge of alleged despotism. Sabato argues that civil wars, uprising, and caudillos were not exceptional or only representing atavistic, pre-modern violence, but simply part of the nineteenth century's repertoire of politics, emerging out of "complex webs of political transformation brought about by the transition to modernity" (p. 175).

Public opinion is the subject of the last of Sabato's thematic chapters. Formed in the press, on the streets, and in a proliferating web of voluntary associations (such as political clubs, freemasons, guilds, mutual aid associations, patriotic societies), public opinion had a more oblique relation to popular sovereignty than did elections or armed citizenship. It was a crucial source of legitimacy for governments, yet also

stood apart from the direct exercise of power. Even though the periodical press, the association movement, and other instances of public action were sometimes highly politicized, public opinion was at least partially independent from politics, and Sabato argues that it became more so over time.

The last chapter puts together the different dimensions explored in the previous three and advances an interpretation of the shaping of Spanish American republics with a focus on the relationships between the people and the government and the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion from the polity. Sabato posits that the terms of how authority was legitimised were worked through negotiations between the “few” and the “many”. The latter had their own agendas to defend and were not mere puppets manipulated by the ruling elites. These dynamics ended in the last third of the nineteenth century, when governments either restricted the franchise or abolished the civic militias or put them under the control of increasingly centralized armies. As Latin America entered the twentieth century, the ideal of popular sovereignty was on the wane and the continent was dominated by centralizing oligarchies with strong anti-liberal tendencies. Based on an immense new literature on political history of postcolonial Latin America, Sabato’s impressive work largely contributes to correct and update the master narrative of politics in the nineteenth century. While most histories of republicanism focus on Europe and the United States, Sabato shows that Spanish American republics can no longer be ignored; instead, their daring adoption of republican-

ism must be central to any transformations of the nineteenth-century world.

#### Notes:

- 1 See for example, J. Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World. A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. P. Camiller, Princeton 2014, p. 478; C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914. Global Connections and Comparisons*, Malden, MA 2004, p. 147.

**Steven Seegel: Map Men. Transnational Lives and Deaths of Geographers in the Making of East Central Europe, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2018, 346 p.**

Reviewed by  
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Steven Seegel presents a fascinating telling of the professional lives of five prominent geographers, how their lives intertwined, strengthened, and strained with the ebb and flow of peace and war. He calls it a love story. The five are Albrecht Penck (German) (1858–1945), Eugeniusz Romer (Polish) (1871–1954), Stepan Rudnyst’kyi (Ukrainian) (1877–1937), Isaiah Bowman (American) (1878–1950), and Count Pál Teleki (Hungarian) (1879–1941). As Chapter One’s title indicates, “Professor Penck’s Pupils”, Albrecht Penck was a mentor to the others. Not only was Penck older than the others, his language and culture was German, the core of a broader “East Central Europe” (“Ostmitteleuropa”) culture. Modern academic structures and thinking were framed by