The independence of Latin America from 1810 to 1825 is one of the great political events of the modern era. All but a handful of the Iberian colonies broke from their colonial rulers and established new nations. Other than Brazil (and briefly Mexico), these new states became republics, as had the United States a few decades earlier. This broad storyline, however, too often overshadows an equally important and very complicated process by which indigenous peoples claimed greater autonomy for many decades after independence. Many gained considerable new autonomy within emerging nations; some found or increased independence; and overall, native peoples often prospered after 1820 in ways they had not been able to during long colonial centuries. Many who had never been conquered by Europeans were able to take back lands lost in the eighteenth century. They, as well as native peoples who had lived within colonial polities, remained engaged with the newly independent states as they had
before with the colonial empires—but many found new, more autonomous ways of engagement. This distinguishes the fifty years after independence from the colonial period and the era of national consolidation that followed after 1860. During this period, while new nations often struggled, many indigenous peoples enjoyed unprecedented independence.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the window of opportunity closed as Spanish American elites and the national states they ruled consolidated power and made alliances with outsiders to crush the autonomy gained by indigenous peoples during and in the decades after independence. The state-building processes that shaped Latin America in the second half of the nineteenth century brought the increasing subjugation and marginalization of native populations. This “third conquest” worsened conditions for indigenous people more than the late eighteenth-century consolidation of the colonial state (which Nancy Farriss calls the “second conquest”). The process of indigenous subjugation and marginalization has only recently begun to reverse; from the 1970s and accelerating into the early twenty-first century, indigenous peoples began to regain a share of political and economic power. The process has been slow and very uneven, as have the results for indigenous majorities.

This essay focuses on the era from late colonial times to the late 1860s, when indigenous peoples forged spaces in which they claimed increased political autonomy and relative economic prosperity. The picture is complicated, but the overarching trends are clear. Indigenous populations across the Americas exhibited many different characteristics and cannot be simply subsumed under the (artificial) category of “Indians.” Not only were there vast regional and national differences—the state did matter—but most indigenous populations were part of one of two general yet divergent categories: they were either peasants integrated into the colonial states, or peoples who resisted the hegemony of the Spanish or Portuguese, British or French Crowns and remained independent of the colonial (and later, national) states. The numbers of these independent peoples were small compared to the peasants living under colonial (mostly Spanish) rule in the eighteenth century, but the uncolonized controlled the majority of the territory of Latin America (and the Americas) until after 1860. Although we have much less documentation about these long-independent peoples, they matter for the importance of their own histories and cultures, and because like the indigenous peasants within the new republics, they profoundly affected the ways new nation-states became new countries.

This chapter argues, based on my own work within the new scholarly understanding of indigenous peoples from 1800 to 1870, that while political visionaries faced the complex conflicts of nation building, many indigenous peoples
enjoyed unprecedented decades of power and prosperity. I concentrate on the Andean highlands and adjacent lowlands. As John Tutino argued for indigenous peasant communities within Mexico, this was a period of “decompression” in which the extractive colonial economies collapsed and state confiscatory powers weakened. Meanwhile, along the frontiers the lack of formal militaries and infrastructure such as forts, missions, and roads meant that many indigenous peoples were able to liberate themselves from European or Spanish American hegemony or push back the frontiers and liberate territory that the Spanish had taken in the decades prior to independence.

The scale of the Atlantic economy and the focus of documentation on the commercial sectors make it difficult to detail the changing levels of economic engagement and power at the regional, community, and household levels. Yet growing complaints of commercial difficulties and scarcities of profit among those who presumed to be powerful, and increasing evidence of independent production and commercial participation among long subordinate or marginal peoples, document new indigenous autonomies across the Andes and into nearby lowlands. These assertions of popular independence in times of struggles to create politically independent states paralleled the consolidations of “household production” that Carolyn Fick details for Saint Domingue as it became Haiti, and Alfredo Ávila and John Tutino show in the complicated process of Mexico’s political development. The increased autonomy claimed by indigenous peoples (and former slaves in Haiti) differentiates the Andes and Mesoamerica (and the revolutionary plantation colony) from regions of the Americas, notably the United States, Cuba, and Brazil, where postindependence expansion of slavery consolidated power and increased coercions within plantation systems—and, in the United States and Brazil, increased pressures toward the displacement of nearby native peoples. In the case of the Andes, participation in the Atlantic economy continued during times of contested nation making, if at reduced levels, as Sarah Chambers emphasizes in chapter 9. And in that continuation, highland indigenous communities become increasingly important producers and interlocutors with the Atlantic economy and an incipient industrial capitalism, reinforcing the Andean ways of redistribution and reciprocity that Chambers also highlights. On the eastern frontiers, independent peoples took advantage of weakened and contested state powers in the long-colonized highlands to mix military power and trade relations to access goods—weapons, tools, cloth, and more—they did not produce. Only after 1860 did the equation change, as indigenous peoples were put under pressure by Spanish American elites and states that took advantage of deepening ties with North Atlantic capitalism to forge a new economic model and marginalize indigenous peoples.
Indigenous peoples within and near Spain’s empire faced a “second conquest”—and sometimes a first—during the decades after 1750. Across the Andean highlands, indigenous peasants suffered from an intensifying reparto de mercancías, in which the local officials called corregidores exacted rising surpluses through monopoly sales of goods—backed by the officials’ administrative and judicial powers. Meanwhile Spanish authorities began to replace community officials with outsiders, often mestizos, sometimes Spaniards, seeking greater control over indigenous communities and their resources. Priests worked to squeeze more monies from their indigenous charges, often leading to conflicts among Church leaders, regime officials, and resistant communities. The successes of these assertions of power and surplus extraction were uneven, but they were especially resented in the Andean region, where the silver economy and thus commercial opportunities were weaker than in New Spain.  

The increased pressures on and exploitation of the indigenous peasantry came to a partial end by the 1780s, in the aftermath of the Great Rebellion in the Southern Andes (1780–1784), which extended far beyond the rising famously led by Túpac Amaru. Three major movements emerged from Andean communities, ranging from Potosí to Cuzco, with different motivations; all generated great violence; all were suppressed by Spanish forces hastily sent from other regions of the viceroyalty. Many of these troops were mestizo or mulatto militias recently organized as part of the Bourbon reforms that attempted to impose the “second conquest.”

The defeat of the uprisings, the execution many leaders, and the punishments meted out to participants and their communities blocked this first move toward greater “Andean independence”—though not necessarily nation-making. Less emphasized but also important, the Spanish Crown prohibited the repartos, and by 1784 the office of corregidor was abolished, replaced by intendentes and subdelegados who were prohibited from trading in their jurisdictions (with only partial success). The new system—and the threat of another insurgency—did alleviate the most resented exactions on the peasant population. There were gains taken in defeat.

Before and after the uprisings, both a cause of the revolts and a consequence of the state’s reforms afterward, Andean communities reconsidered and reorganized their internal leadership structures. Hereditary kurakas, the local nobility that often traced origins to pre-Inka times and had entrenched their status as key intermediaries linking the Spanish and indigenous worlds during the late sixteenth-century consolidation of the silver boom led by Potosí, lost ground to commoners claiming leadership in the communities. At times, communities
ran the old kurakas (as well as non-Indian ones set up by Spanish authorities) out of town or even killed them, insisting that the *común* was to rule. After the Great Rebellion, led by kurakas such as Túpac Amaru—at times pressed by commoners against abusive kurakas—regime reforms accelerated the demise of the indigenous nobility. Annually elected *alcaldes de indios* replaced hereditary indigenous leaders in Andean communities. The mix of rebellion and reform accelerated a new political culture among indigenous peasants in the Andes—a grassroots democracy that soon engaged the new, liberal winds that reverberated through the empire in the era of Cádiz.

The situation was different in the frontier areas east of the Andean heartland. There the Spanish Bourbon regime brought severe pressure on indigenous groups that had remained independent. They had not faced, or had fended off, the first conquest. Through the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, the Spanish regime had remained mostly in the territories claimed in the sixteenth. The revitalization of the Spanish state under Bourbons and the search for resources and revenues in a commercially dynamic and imperially competitive eighteenth century brought a more aggressive frontier policy. Military expeditions brought forts into long-uncolonized regions, followed by the establishment of missions under the Franciscans who aimed to incorporate, convert, and subordinate independent peoples. Scientific-military expeditions explored territories unknown to Crown officials. By the first decade of the nineteenth, the Spanish regime had expanded its reach into the lowland centers of indigenous resistance of South America: across the arid Chaco plains; pressing the southern borders of Chile past the Bío Bío River into Araucanía; and deep into the pampas of the Río de la Plata region. In Chile, intensified negotiations with the various native peoples south of the Bío Bío opened long-held indigenous territories to Spanish settlers. Independent peoples submitted to the frontier militias concentrated in new forts or lived around new missions set in regions where the European presence was new and intensifying. As David Weber argued, in the late colonial period the Spanish regime pressed a dynamic and successful (in Spanish terms) frontier policy based on a new conception of the Indian as “savage,” supported by scientific explorations, militarization, and systematic trade with independent peoples.

These policies and programs drove Spanish control beyond boundaries in place for over a century. The only region of South America where the new Spanish aggressive policy did not work and where the Spanish did not gain initiative, territory, and influence was the jungle zone east of central Peru. There the Juan Santos Atahualpa rebellion expelled the Franciscan missions in the rough foothills east of the central Sierra in the 1740s. But this was an exception.
MAP 10.1. Spanish imperial control in South America, ca. 1800
Across most frontier areas, the militarization through militias and professional troops, often followed by missions and sometimes by new Hispanic settlers, brought advances against independent indigenous peoples.

Regaining Power: Independence and Indigenous Peoples

The long struggles for independence set off after 1808 by Napoleon’s assault on the imperial center in Spain and energized after 1810 by the participations offered and limited under Cádiz liberalism, brought new pressure on integrated indigenous populations across the Andes, as conflicts between autonomists and royalists became civil wars. Too often, interpretations of independence suggest that along the Andean mountain spine from the Audiencia de Quito (roughly present-day Ecuador) to the altiplano and high valleys ending south of Potosí, the dense settlements of long-colonized indigenous communities stood aside, in contrast to the assertive participations of so many in the Great Rebellion of the 1780s. It appears that Spanish Americans remained in charge during the wars that led to independence, and that indigenous peoples mostly served as transporters of goods and dependent auxiliaries, while often seeing their cattle and foodstuffs taken by troops on both sides. Yet indigenous men served in various armies and communities, backing one side or another based on local interests, conflicts, and opportunities. Many, likely a majority of integrated indigenous peoples, tried to keep their heads down and stay out of fighting among factions of people who had long aimed to rule them and claim their labor and surpluses. Some indigenous communities, as in Pasto, New Granada (today Colombia), backed the royalist cause after the Popayán governor decreased their tribute. They created a “popular royalism” that favored the commoners over the traditional powers, as some communities had farther south in the Great Rebellion. When communities could negotiate participation on favorable terms, they might join the fray for a time; but as independence conflicts became generalized and violent, dealing with whatever army passed by became a strategy for survival.

A spate of urban movements across the Andes debated autonomy and loyalty in the aftermath of Napoleon’s assault on imperial legitimacy in 1808. A patriot army sent from the city of Buenos Aires under Juan José Castelli entered Upper Peru (now Bolivia) but was defeated in 1811 at Huaqui, on the altiplano near Lake Titicaca. The porteños initially gained support in many indigenous communities along their march. Castelli proclaimed the end of tribute payments and denounced the “slavery” he imagined the Indians suffered, asserting that the Buenos Aires junta saw the Indians as “brothers.” Indigenous auxilia-
ries were instrumental in the Argentine army’s victories in Suipacha, but Castelli’s favor toward Indians turned many non-Indians against the “patriots.” At the battle of Huaqui, the native auxiliaries who accompanied Castelli waited on the sidelines. With defeat at Huaqui, the porteño troops dispersed and began to sack the surrounding countryside and the Potosí treasury. The Indians of Sicasica refused to aid Castelli in his retreat. Other indigenous groups took advantage of the confusion to sack the city of La Paz, presumably controlled by “patriot” troops from Cochabamba. The American Spaniards of La Paz made peace with the royalists and kept their peace until independence was declared.

Such urban adaptations for and against Cádiz liberalism sent conflict into the countryside. There Spanish American leaders seeking autonomy allied with indigenous villages to mount guerrilla campaigns against the loyalist forces. The most notable indigenous rebellion was the Pumacahua rising of 1814. Mateo García Pumacahua traced his lineage back to Inka kings; he had been a loyalist and a leading commander against Túpac Amaru in the 1780s. He became interim president of the Audiencia (the High Court and primary colonial authority in Cuzco). Feeling marginalized by loyalist authorities, in 1814 he joined a rebellion begun and led by Spanish Americans; Pumacahua became the main military commander and attracted many Indians to his rebel army. However, the rebellion was suppressed by well-armed Spanish troops and Indian auxiliaries in 1815 as Fernando VII reclaimed power and abrogated the Cádiz Constitution. Pumacahua was executed in the regional capital of Sicuani.

Most of the guerrilla republiquetas were pacified by 1816. Overt combat between loyalists and groups seeking autonomy receded in the Andes until 1820, when Spanish liberals preparing to lead an expedition to fight the independence movement led by Simón Bolívar in Gran Colombia (modern Colombia and Venezuela) forced Ferdinand VII to reinstitute the Cádiz Constitution and its liberal precepts. That provided the opening for pro-independence armies to move north from Buenos Aires and Chile and south from Gran Colombia, to crush a still-loyal royalist Andean core. Bolívar and San Martín understood that only the “liberation” of the deeply indigenous Andean highland core, still ruled by powers loyal to Spain, could ensure political autonomy in their Caracas and Buenos Aires homelands.

The conflicts that led to independence in the Andes mixed civil wars among Spanish Americans and changing participation among indigenous leaders and communities as dynamics and opportunities evolved. Early events in Upper Peru revealed American Spaniards’ ambivalence and indigenous communities’ independence. In both Perus, elites feared that a revolution might become what they saw as a race war—that is, a rising of indigenous masses reminiscent of the
1780s. Spanish Americans had long benefited from the colonial system and in their dominance over the Indians, notably by receiving tribute and labor via the mitá and other means. Many native Andeans were leery of Spanish Americans and, after their initial enthusiasm for the Auxiliary Army from Buenos Aires, also of “foreigners” who promised much, but whose power and commitment to indigenous welfare proved tenuous. In the small republiquetas later formed to fight the royalists, Indians, mestizos, and Americans Spaniards mixed, but españoles americanos held most of the leadership. In the regions that became Peru, many indigenous communities only mobilized in 1820, when the viceregal court faced a siege from porteño general San Martín’s army from Chile and fled Lima seeking refuge in the ancient indigenous capital at Cuzco. Even then, most native communities stood aside from the conflicts that created Peru and Bolivia.

The situation was different on the frontiers. The wars that shook the Spanish empire and eventually led to independence had even more profound effects there. For independent peoples who did not recognize themselves as “Indians”—this was a Spanish term—these regions were not margins but homelands. For people who had remained free of Spanish rule, often while obtaining arms and other goods through raids and trades, the wars opened new times of real independence and economic expansion. And for many, the times of indigenous independence lasted long into the nineteenth century.

There were many and diverse reasons for the assertion of independent indigenous peoples along what the Spanish called la frontera. Many troops stationed at the frontier in the Bourbon military buildup left to fight on one side or the other in the independence wars (it was frontier troops, including the gauchos of the pampas and the llaneros of Venezuela and Colombia who backed San Martín and Bolívar). Royalist leaders knew that the most experienced troops manned the frontier forts; they repeatedly called them to defend the regime. Patriots recruited the same forces whenever they could. As wars persisted and widened within the core regions of the colonies, the officials saw higher priorities than funding frontier forts. As silver revenues fell and tribute payments dried up in the highland communities, governments could not support the forts. As troops and subsidies withdrew, indigenous peoples took over vast swaths of territory. In some regions, the mission system meant to contain and convert frontier ethnic groups collapsed when Spanish missionaries left, whether by force or fear. This occurred among once-thriving Franciscan missions among the Chiriguanos in the Andean foothills of eastern Upper Peru. In 1813, seventeen missions contained more than eighteen thousand Indians. By
1825, only two missions remained. Similar processes weakened missions on the pampas and in the southern Chile.

Amid complex conflicts and adaptations along diverse frontiers, independent indigenous peoples recouped territories they had lost to Bourbon imperial offensives. Some independent Indians fought on the side of the patriots, including the Chiriguano cacique Cumbay. In 1813 he met porteño general Manuel Belgrano in Potosí to offer his warriors to the patriot leader. The Pehuenche in Chile favored the royalists and collaborated with loyal officers to attack the recently established Chilean republic. In turn, the Chilean patriot leader José Miguel Carrera had allied with the Ranquel Indians across the Andes to fight against patriot rivals. Independent peoples took different sides during the wars; most aimed to promote their own independence; few developed an ideological predilection among Spanish Americans or Europeans, whose visions of Indians differed little and never included indigenous independence.

In sum, the wars in the early nineteenth century affected South American indigenous peoples differently. Peasants living under colonial Spanish rule suffered the depredations of warfare, losing livestock and supplies to passing armies. Many were forced to work for one side or the other as porters, spies, providing shelter and the like. Other indigenous peoples aimed to take their fates in their own hands, with limited success. The Pumacahua rebellion failed, in part because of the fear the earlier Great Rebellion in the 1780s still engendered among American Spaniards. At and beyond the frontier, independent peoples had different experiences. They quickly saw a lessening of the pressure of the late colonial state; in many regions they took back control over areas they had lost to Bourbon conquest. Some independent groups joined the wars, often on the side of the patriots. They helped create a military balance that favored their own independence—recouping lost territory and populations.

*After Independence: Indigenous Power and Wealth*

Once the wars were over, new and still contested Andean states relied more than ever on indigenous peoples and their tribute payments to sustain themselves. Other sources of income, notably mining revenues, diminished dramatically. The dependence of the new states in the Andes on tribute incomes led to a rebalancing of power between them, the indigenous communities within them, and the increasingly independent peoples on their margins. The new states did not have the capacity to put much pressure on indigenous groups, within or without, while many Spanish Americans looked to redefine the colonial pact in which indigenous groups held a predetermined subordinate

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Map 10.2. Spanish South America, ca. 1820
position. This led to experiments in defining the nation as a multiethnic construct, attempts abandoned in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Then indigenous peoples returned to subordinate positions; even worse, government policies deliberately marginalized them, or attempted to eliminate them completely, either physically (as happened along many frontiers), or as distinct peoples with their own institutions, cultures, and languages.

As Spanish rule ended and while nations were constructed and debated, the indigenous peoples integrated within the new states and the independent natives at their margins claimed real gains. The rising autonomy of indigenous peasants and communities within the nations led to greater prosperity and often higher standards of living because neither the state nor Spanish American landlords had the ability to extract as much surplus as during colonial times. In contrast to developments in Mexico, the new Andean governments reinstated the indigenous tribute, soon after abolishing it in the afterglow of independence. In Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, governments were desperately short of funds, as other revenue sources did not materialize. They gave the renewed tribute different names, but the idea was the same—each Indian male between fifteen and fifty paid a tax in return for access to community land. That pact made explicit a relation implicit in the Spanish colonial order. It also made new states dependent on indigenous communities and gave their members, especially their men, a sense of entitlement to their lands. Across the Andes, the head tax endured at levels less than the colonial tribute. No government increased the amount of the head tax while the system remained in place. Presuming inflation over the nineteenth century, the head tax became a shrinking burden on each household—while solidifying rights to lands and autonomies in indigenous communities.

Elsewhere in South America, tribute ended. In some areas, tribute had counted for little and was abolished early in the republican era or shortly thereafter. In the regions that became Argentina, the only Indians to pay tribute lived as peasants in the far northwestern part of the federation’s Andean provinces, and their contributions were insignificant to the national treasury. The Buenos Aires revolutionary government abolished tribute in 1811, before the invasion of Upper Peru. In Colombia, the Congress of Cúcuta abolished Indian tribute in 1821; it lived on briefly as a “personal contribution,” but largely disappeared by the end of the 1820s.

Across the Andes, the basis for peasant organization, the república de indios, was strengthened as weak states relied on indigenous leaders to administer villages and collect tributes; the persistence of tribute fortified the village structures put in place to collect it. A few Spanish Americans became tribute collectors,
now more a measure of integration into indigenous communities than an insertion of outside interference (as such attempts had become under Spanish rule). Arguably, postindependence Spanish South America was more republican and local governance stronger than in any period until the agrarian reforms of the twentieth century. It was a time of republican governance based in indigenous peasant villages, often invisible to Spanish American and mestizo townspeople, who suffered from caudillismo and ongoing political instability. The exception seems to have been Ecuador, where many highland Indian villages were controlled by Spanish American and mestizo landlords and officials.²⁹

After independence, debate widened among Spanish Americans about whether Indians constituted citizens as other members of society did. Following the precedent of Cádiz, initial responses were yes: all citizens—no longer colonial subjects—should be equal.³⁰ When General José de San Martín invaded Lima with his Chilean and porteño troops, he decreed that all citizens should be called Peruvians; in the highlands this was taken to mean only Indians.³¹ Simón Bolívar, in a famous 1824 decree that also followed Cádiz precedents, proclaimed that all Indian communities should be broken up and their lands distributed among their members. Lands not claimed by individual Indians would be sold by the state in public auction. A year later, Bolívar provided a formula for dividing the land, providing Indian caciques twice the land of ordinary community members, but also abolishing hereditary leadership (cacczagos).³² After Bolivar left and while facing fiscal penury and an indigenous majority demanding traditional roles and rights, the Bolivian state reversed these laws in the late 1820s. That reversal meant that integrated indigenous peoples in the Andes remained differentiated by the old “stain” of conquest and tributary subordination, though every country masked the fact by calling the tribute by different names, such as “personal contribution” (contribución personal). People thus marked as Indian still voted in national elections, but as the century wore on, literacy and landowning requirements increasingly excluded rural peoples, Indian or not. This did not affect village-level administration, which was subsumed under the Indian republics reinforced by the consolidation of their residents’ separate status.³³ In sum—and in diverse local ways—indigenous peoples faced prejudice in the nations yet consolidated power and production in their communities.

Despite the equivocal and diminishing citizenship rights of Indian in national republics, their social rights remained intact or even expanded in their local communities—the heirs to colonial indigenous republics. We have little information on labor regimes in the early national decades. The information we have suggests a less oppressive hacienda regime; in some cases some land
reforms effectively turned renters (*arrenderos*)\(^{34}\) into smallholders. In others landlords gave haciendas to Indians, as happened in Tomina Province in southern Bolivia, where the priest Manuel Martín Santa Cruz in his 1857 testament donated his hacienda, Collpa Lupiara, to his Indian arrenderos.\(^{35}\)

Similarly, we lack information on advanced pay and obligated rural labor on estates (too often called called debt peonage, implying domination that was rarely real) for the first few decades after independence. Still, Arnold Bauer has argued that postindependence labor relations were relatively favorable to the hacienda workers—a situation well documented across Mexico. Estate owners could not rely on weak states for police power to find or return workers who took proffered advances of goods and wages and then absconded. More revealing, why would employers offer pay in advance, given very weak enforcement mechanisms? The advances worked as enticements to labor, offered to men with lands and rights in entrenched communities. If they did not perform the work or repay, estates could rarely make their debtors pay in the decades of indigenous independence.\(^{36}\) In Colombia, for example, Aline Helg shows that neither the state nor landlords could discipline labor in the mountainous and heavily forested Caribbean region, where people easily escaped and many villages were beyond the powers of governments or landlords.\(^{37}\)

National state and landlord powers also weakened when indigenous leaders became local and regional authorities. Cecilia Méndez has shown that in the aftermath of the royalist rebellion in Huanta from 1825 to 1828, the indigenous peasant leaders Tadeo Choque and Antonio Abad Huachaca remained the regional authorities, the former as provincial governor, the latter as a justice of the peace. They fought for the heartland caudillo Andrés de Santa Cruz in the 1830s and until the ends of their lives remained the power brokers of their districts.\(^{38}\)

Struggling national states without the resources and power to favor Spanish Americans and their commercial enterprises meant that indigenous peasants could engage in activities without governments or landlords being able (or at times even interested) to take the surplus. In the Andes, indigenous peasants controlled much of the food production and most of the transport sector, provisioning cities and mining centers as well as carrying minerals to the coast and imported goods into the highlands. Many traded in contraband silver, colluding with import/export merchants and, at times, with mine owners too. Informal alliance among indigenous muleteers and llama herders, merchants, and silver miners worked to keep the state weak so that all could avoid taxes.\(^{39}\) No wonder the definition of the Andean states was vague and contested for decades, as Sarah Chambers shows. Many Spanish American elites and indigenous
communities did not see defined boundaries or stable powers as in their best interests.

Andean peasant communities joined in extensive commerce, supplying cities with foodstuffs and locally made textiles, along with forage, fuel, and wood (though the difficulty of getting at the municipal records has hindered a full analysis of its importance). Until the late nineteenth century, indigenous communities held the vast majority of arable land, making their predominance of food production a certainty. Tristan Platt has documented that northern Potosí communities produced the wheat that supplied much of the Bolivian highlands. Municipal police records provide evidence of the amount of foodstuffs that indigenous traders sold in nineteenth-century cities such as Oruro and Potosí.40

Outside the control of the new states—though not outside their imagined boundaries—still-independent peoples joined in important commerce often tied to international trade; with no state authority to record it, their commerce remains unmeasured. Most significant was the cattle trade in the South American pampas. Kristine Jones details how the raiding economies of the Mapuche and other peoples of the Southern Cone as well as the Comanche and Apache who ruled between Mexico and the United States became enterprises important to the world economy. They competed directly and successfully with Spanish Americans for the resources of their regions.41 Such raiding economies made possible the rise of proto-states such as Calfucurá, an alliance of Araucanian and Pampas Indians who dominated the salt licks of the Salinas Grandes where the cattle herds taken from the pampas had to pass on their way west to Chile.42

The commercial opportunities claimed by independent Indians were tied to the weakness of the new republics.43 The frontier military balance shifted to favor independent Indians—an advantage that endured to the 1870s. The new states facing difficulties financing activities in their core regions and wracked by internecine conflict drew frontier-hardened militias to help rule their heartland cores—often to little avail. Some leaders tried to bring independent Indians into the fight, but at their peril. Such independent peoples brought independent agendas, sometimes launching campaigns against their “allies” and often raiding for their own advantage, debilitating national frontiers even more. In only one case is it clear that the engagement of independent indigenous warriors brought gains to Spanish Americans: Juan Manuel de Rosas, the governor of Buenos Aires, allied himself with Calfucurá and other caciques to fight the Voroganos allied with the Carrera brothers in disputes over rule of the Argentine Confederation in 1830. To succeed, Rosas had to pay his Indian allies thousands of horses and cattle, along with expensive sugar and tobacco.44

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The balance of power favoring independent Indians led to uneasy relations with frontier towns and villages, and large landlords too. Alliances shifted constantly as political realities changed, reflecting rivalries on both sides of the frontier. In central Argentina, along the eastern frontier of Peru, and in southeastern Bolivia fights among political factions, different jurisdictions, and indigenous peoples with their own allies and enemies led to raids and conflicts in which indigenous groups might ally with Spanish American states or factions to launch strikes against indigenous groups or Spanish American towns linked to their political opponents. Violence was endemic across frontier regions, affecting every political and social unit from national and indigenous federation leaders all the way down to the household level. Baretea and Markofflong ago detected enduring violence on cattle frontiers in Latin America; this analysis suggests that the violence as was as much about political power as about cattle.45

In these decades of independence, indigenous groups leveraged superior powers of violence to gain access to goods they otherwise would not have had. Landlords and local officials paid goods to keep Indians at bay. In Argentina, provincial governments paid indios amigos what they called vicios, goods such as tobacco and sugar, horses and cattle, to compensate their service as buffers to other, hostile Indians. Many leaders of powerful groups on the pampas and in Patagonia maintained constant written communication with provincial governors. Some maintained embassies in provincial capitals, creating state-like relations with their provincial peers.46 In Bolivia, landlords and departmental governors paid Chiriguanos to remain allies—tribute Spanish Americans paid to Indians. Still, independent Indians often switched allegiances, leading Spanish Americans to accuse them of treachery—as if indigenous peoples could not have their own strategic, diplomatic, and economic interests. Much of the frustration came as Spanish Americans saw that they were the weaker party—the payers of tribute. They could only hope that independent Indians would become dependent on them for goods they could not produce themselves: firearms, sugar, and fine cloth. As there were usually multiple suppliers, alliances remained fragile and raids continued.47

The decades from the 1820s to the 1860s, or even the 1880s (depending on the region) saw indigenous peoples claim lives more independent and often more well off than during late colonial times. The peasants and communities that had been integrated into the Spanish polity after the conquest were rarely integrated fully as citizens within national states after independence. But they managed quite well without much interference from state authorities. As landed villagers provided most of the foodstuffs to the towns and villages throughout the Andes, peasants clung to the tributary regime—a small
burden exchanged for great local autonomy. Weak states continued to support the communities, reinforcing local self-rule and the landholding essential to villagers, regional economies, and state revenues. Local patriarchal democracies continued within villages entrenched in rights long ago granted to them as repúblicas de indios.

Spanish American landlords had little access to capital during the postindependence period of weak markets; they could not rely on weak and contested states to force labor or the repayment of advances. So supposedly powerful elites pressed favors and advances to keep men on the job, even guaranteeing credit at local shops. At and beyond the frontiers, independent raids by indigenous peoples that Spanish Americans insisted on calling “Indians”—presuming their subordination while the latter repeatedly demonstrated their power—brought constantly shifting alliances, wars, and trades, and even the payment of tributes by Spaniards to Indians. Political turbulence was everywhere, in national heartlands, along frontiers, and beyond. So too was unprecedented indigenous independence: in communities denied full citizenship, but guaranteed lands and local autonomies; among independent peoples who would not recognize that they should live as Indians, docile and dependent.

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Indigenous and Popular Independence across the Americas

Indigenous independence reached far beyond the Andean highlands and nearby lowlands during the decades after 1810. In the Mesoamerican regions of central and southern Mexico, former indigenous republics lost legal sanction and faced attempts to privatize their lands, yet decades of national commercial troubles and political instability allowed many communities to consolidate control of production for sustenance and local markets. In the once commercially rich Bajío, a decade of insurgency took down the silver economy and enabled indigenous and mixed-race peoples, long without rights to indigenous republics, to take control of local production while prejudicing the commercial foundations of the nation. And beyond the frontiers of a once expansive New Spain, a Comanche empire built in a century of war and trade with Spanish North America used mobile cavalry to mount assertive raids and active trades and emerge as the dominant power on the high plains west of the Mississippi from 1810 and 1850.

Assertions of indigenous independence after 1810 are most notable in and near the Andes and New Spain, once the core regions of Spain’s American empire. The fall of the empire and the collapse of the silver economies weakened regime powers and cut entrepreneurial opportunities, opening spaces in which indigenous communities and other popular groups pressed claims to independence within struggling new nations. The fall of Spain’s empire and the silver economies also undermined the Spanish American nations’ abilities to press power beyond their borders, enabling Comanche, Mapuche, and other independent peoples’ new assertions of power.

Assertions of indigenous and popular independence extended beyond the regions once pivotal to the silver economies. In the western highlands of Guatemala, Maya communities grounded in indigenous republics and entrenched on the land made themselves central to the struggles that created a Guatemala nation separate from the imagined Central American Federation. In lowland Yucatán, a region famously beyond the dynamism of New Spain’s silver economy, communities pressed their interests after 1821—culminating in a devastating war for Maya independence (too long mislabeled a caste war) in the 1840s that threatened the capital at Mérida and enabled thousands to live in true independence for decades. Far to the south, in the interior headwaters of the Río de la Plata system, Guaraní peoples long dealing with Jesuit missions (until the 1767 expulsion) in lands contested by Spanish and Portuguese frontiersmen became the foundation of a Guaraní-speaking Paraguay after 1810, turning inward against participation in Atlantic trade.

While popular assertions of independence were most widespread and successful across Spain’s former domains, they were important in the Atlantic slave
societies, too. That former slaves ruled Haiti is often noted as a hemispheric exception; that ex-slaves there shaped the second American nation by taking the land for family production is less often noted and makes Haitian independence less exceptional. Autonomy on the land was a key goal and a widespread reality across the hemisphere in the age of independence. And Haitians’ success helped inspire parallel risings by slaves seeking their definitions of freedom and independence across Atlantic America. Near Richmond, Virginia, the conspiracy known as Gabriel’s Rebellion developed in 1800 while the Haitian Revolution continued. The plot was revealed to authorities; the conspirators arrested and executed—yet the threat alone led national politicians to resolve an emerging political crisis, preserving national unity and the emerging economy of cotton and slavery.55 The 1812 Aponte rebellion challenged slavery in Cuba in the year the Cádiz Constitution proclaimed liberties for American Spaniards and indigenous peoples too, but not people of African ancestry.56 Slaves rose in British Demerara in 1823 and in Bahia, Brazil, in 1835.57 Conspiracies rumored and real were everywhere where slavery continued.58 When the United States fell into civil war over slavery in 1860, slaves quickly looked to their own interests in a conflict they could not control.59 Amid that struggle, slaves in Dutch Guyana rose against their bondage.60

Many people of African ancestry bound to labor as slaves pursued independence across the Americas. After Haiti, however, they found little success. Did the reconsolidation of slave-based export economies (beyond Haiti) after 1800 provide economic resources, sustain state powers, and contain slaves’ assertions? The contrast with the widespread collapse of silver, enduring political instability, and the meaningful turn to indigenous independence in Spanish America seems clear.

Key exceptions to indigenous independence during the first half of the nineteenth century confirm that comparative understanding. Where expanding slave-based production for export sustained early commercial prosperity, funded political stability, and drove expansion into interiors to further export production, notably in the U.S. South, indigenous peoples faced war and displacement. Andrew Jackson’s campaigns and the forced removal of the Cherokee to Oklahoma are the most famous of the assaults that make the contrast clear.61 In Brazil’s south-central interior, indigenous peoples faced pressures culminating in war just before the arrival of the Portuguese court in 1808. The contested shift to political independence that led to the Brazilian empire brought brief times of relief that soon became a contested indigenous independence as coffee plantations worked with slave labor expanded into natives’ homeland.62
In the making of new countries across the Americas, complexity and divergence were everywhere. Still, revealing patterns emerge: where commercial economies struggled and state-making proved long and contested, indigenous peoples claimed meaningful independence; where slavery and export prosperity persisted, slaves sought “independence” on the model of Haiti, yet found little success; where cotton and slavery drove into indigenous lands, slavery expanded and native peoples faced death and displacement. Only in Haiti did the laboring subjects of colonial prosperity claim enduring independence. They inspired many others—and set fear spreading among those who still aimed to profit from slavery. For their self-liberating efforts, Haitians gained lives of autonomous poverty on the land, faced military rulers at home, and lived excluded from the world of commercial nations—the only world that mattered among those who ruled across the Atlantic and the Americas in the nineteenth century.

While political visionaries struggled to create states that would allow political independence to a few across the Americas, indigenous peoples, slaves of African ancestry, and diverse others pressed their own visions of independence. For them, access to land, community rights, family production, and cultural autonomy were often more important than state powers. The latter, after all, were often mobilized against popular groups pressing their versions of independence. During decades when state building was contested and commercial economies struggled, indigenous and popular independence was a clear goal and a widely lived reality—in Haiti, across Spanish America, and in continental interiors never subjected to colonial rule. It rarely survived the expansion of export economies and the consolidations of state power that marked the Americas after 1870.

Notes
1 The term they identified themselves with was españoles americanos, in distinction to indios or mestizos. In later times, scholars have called them creoles (criollos), but this is not what they called themselves, at least not in the Andes. For an essay on the use of españoles americanos in the south-central Andes, see Tristan Platt, “Historias unidas, memorias escindidas: Las empresas mineras de los hermanos Ortiz y la construcción de las élites nacionales, Salta y Potosí 1800–1880,” in Dos décadas de investigación en historia económica comparada en América Latina: Homenaje a Carlos Sempat Assadourian, ed. Margaret Menegus (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1999), 285–362.

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For the best overview of the aftermath of the Great Rebellion, see Charles F. Walker, *Smoldering Ashes: Cuzco and the Creation of Republican Peru, 1780–1840* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 55–83. However, Walker does not deal adequately with the issue of the alleviation of the tax burden on Andean peasants.

This does not mean that the Spanish (and the Portuguese) hadn’t explored virtually all of the Americas by the sixteenth century; other than some slave raiding—especially the *bandeiras* of the Portuguese—the boundaries established by the end of the sixteenth century between the colonial states and the independent Indians remained remarkably stable. They largely paralleled the limits of peasant economies the Spanish had conquered, with some expansion especially into northern Mexico because of the silver to be had there. In the case of Brazil, the discovery of diamonds and gold in the Minas Gerais region in the late seventeenth century brought about similar expansion of Portuguese control.


Weber, *Bárbaros*. As Pekka Hämäläinen points out for the northern reaches of Spanish America, the Spanish entered into an alliance with the Comanche to contain the Apaches. The situation there was more complicated than might appear from Spanish records. See Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), chap. 3.


“Proclama de Castelli a los indios del virreinato de Perú,” as cited in René Danilo Arze Aguirre, *Participación popular en la independencia de Bolivia* (La Paz: Fundación Cultural Quipus, 1987), 145.

“Proclama de Castelli a los indios del virreinato de Perú,” 148–151.


26. We need studies on prices in nineteenth-century Latin America to prove this point.


30. In fact, this is what the 1812 Cádiz Constitution posited, but Ferdinand VII re­neged on it when he returned to power in 1816.

32 José Flores Moncayo, *Legislación boliviana del indio* (La Paz: n.p., 1953), 23–39. In this, Bolívar followed the ideas of the 1812 Constitution of Cádiz, which defined all citizens born in Spanish territories as Spanish citizens. For Cádiz, see the essay by Roberto Breña.

33 For the Andes, see Thurner, *From Two Republics*; Marta Irurozqui, “A balita, piedra y palo”: *La construcción de la ciudadanía política en Bolivia, 1826–1932* (Seville: Diputación de Sevilla, 2000), and Larson, *Trials of Nation Making*.

34 “Arrendero” is a category that implied paying rent in money, goods, and services to the landlord in return for the use of a plot of land and a small house.

35 Notaría de Padilla (Chuquisaca, Bolivia), 1882, fs. 176–179.


40 Tristan Platt, *Estado tributario y libre cambio en Potosí (siglo XIX): Mercado indígena, proyecto proteccionista y lucha de ideologías monetarias* (La Paz: Instituto de Historia Social Boliviana, 1986). These records exist in the municipal archives as well as fragments in the police records of the Archivo Nacional de Bolivia (Sucré) in Tribunal Nacional de Cuentas.

41 Kristine L. Jones, “Comparative Raiding Economies: North and South,” in Guy and Sheridan, *Contested Ground*, 97–114. For the Comanche, see Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*.


43 Here there is a marked distinction with imperial Brazil, which did not suffer from this weakness.


46 See Vezub, Valentin Saygüeque. Geraldine Davies is working on a dissertation on these relations and has found more correspondence of the type that Vezub found.


49 John Tutino argued this long ago in From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico.


51 The key study is Hämäläinen, Comanche Empire.

52 This is detailed by Jordana Dym in chapter 7.


55 Douglas Egerton, Gabriel’s Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); on the politics


60 Marjoleine Kors is writing a major analysis of this conflict.


62 Langfur, *The Forbidden Lands*. 

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