
Race War and Nation in Caribbean Gran Colombia, Cartagena, 1810–1832

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DURING THE AGE OF REVOLUTION, nations in the Americas faced the quandary of how to reconcile slavery and racial discrimination with the enlightened and liberal ideology of citizenship. Would slavery be abolished? Would all free men, regardless of race, enjoy the equal rights of citizenship, and if not, how would that exclusion be justified within an ideology that proclaimed the equality and brotherhood of humankind? From 1810 to 1812, patriot movements across Spanish America answered the last question by declaring legal racial equality for all free citizens and constructing a nationalist ideology of racial harmony—what contemporary scholars call the myth of racial democracy.¹ In Mexico, the rebel leader Miguel Hidalgo proclaimed the end of racial distinctions: “Indians, mulattos or other castes . . . all will be known as Americans.”² In Venezuela, the 1811 constitution decreed the derogation of “all the ancient laws that degraded the segment of the free population of Venezuela heretofore known as *pardos* [free blacks and mulattos] . . . [and] restored all the inalienable rights that are accorded to them as to any other citizens.”³ Farther south, the revolutionary junta in Buenos Aires repudiated colonial caste laws and condemned the “prejudices responsible for the degradation to which the accidental difference of color condemned until now a part of our population as numerous as it is capable of any great enterprise.”⁴ By the time the wars of independence ended in 1824, the constitutions of all the nations in Spanish America granted legal racial

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¹ I use the term “racial harmony” because it is more reflective of early-nineteenth-century language than “racial democracy,” a term coined much later. Some of the ideological characteristics of the myth of racial democracy changed between the early nineteenth century and the twentieth century—highlighting the need to historicize its cultural evolution in the past two centuries. However, what did not change was the linkage between nationalism and racial harmony and equality that characterizes this myth. Richard Graham, ed., *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940* (Austin, Tex., 1990).

² Quotation and translation from George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800–2000* (New York, 2004), 87.

³ *La constitución federal de Venezuela de 1811 y documentos afines*, preliminary study by C. Parra Pérez (Caracas, 1959), 205. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

⁴ Quotation and translation from George Reid Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800–1900* (Madison, Wis., 1980), 59.

equality to their free populations of African descent, and a nationalist racial ideology had emerged that declared racial discrimination—and racial identity—divisive and unpatriotic. In contrast, nineteenth-century nationalism in the United States centered on ideologies of manifest destiny and white supremacy.⁵ What explains this difference?

This essay argues that the revolutionary wars were crucial for the construction of these different national racial imaginaries, and that any historical analysis of comparative race relations in the Americas needs to take into account the important role of anticolonial struggles in the formation of racial identities. The literature on nationalism and the Age of Revolution has made us aware of the importance of this period in shaping national identity.⁶ However, we still do not have a comparative study that explores why societies with similar colonial pasts of slavery and racial prejudice developed such divergent racial national imaginaries during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This is partly because of the tendency of U.S. and Latin American historians to assume that the colonial pasts of their regions naturally led to their modern racial identities. Yet as David Brion Davis already noted in 1966, “differences between slavery in Latin America and the United States were not greater than regional or temporal differences within the countries themselves . . . negro bondage was a single phenomenon, or Gestalt, whose variations were less significant than underlying patterns of unity.”⁷ Thirty years later—after summarizing the scholarship on U.S. and Brazilian slavery—Anthony Marx similarly concluded that there is little in the two countries’ colonial pasts that warrants their dissimilar histories of modern race relations.⁸ Indeed, when one colonial experience is set against the other, the divergent national racial imaginaries of the United States and Latin America seem less natural. Although this essay is not a comparative analysis, it examines the construction of Colombian racial identities against the background of the United States’ experience to argue that racial democracy was neither inevitable nor a colonial legacy.

The absence of dialogue between the literature on nationalism during the Age of Revolution and the literature on comparative race relations is largely a consequence of the nature of the historiography on the Spanish American wars of independence (1808–1824).⁹ Historians have tended to downplay the social importance

⁵ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981).

⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991); Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley, Calif., 1991); Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, Calif., 1984); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, Conn., 1992); David A. Bell, “The Unbearable Lightness of Being French: Law, Republicanism and National Identity at the End of the Old Regime,” *AHR* 106, no. 4 (October 2001): 1215–1235; Andrew W. Robertson, “‘Look on This Picture . . . and on This!’ Nationalism, Localism, and Partisan Images of Otherness in the United States, 1787–1820,” *AHR* 106, no. 4 (October 2001): 1263–1280.

⁷ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1966), 229.

⁸ “The modern house of race in each country was built on similar foundations of prejudice but constructed according to varying circumstances.” Anthony Marx, *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of South Africa, the United States, and Brazil* (Cambridge, 1998), 10. Marx’s analysis, however, focuses on the second half of the nineteenth century and not on the anticolonial struggles of the Age of Revolution.

⁹ For an assessment of the revolutionary nature of the Spanish American wars of independence, see Eric Van Young, “Conclusion: Was There an Age of Revolution in Spanish America?” in Victor

of this period, arguing that the new republican notions of citizenship provided an illusion of change while leaving social structures untouched.¹⁰ Studies of race relations followed this assumption. Although the works of John Lynch, Winthrop R. Wright, George Reid Andrews, and Aline Helg, among others, acknowledge in passing the presence of a rhetoric of racial equality among patriots, they do not analyze its ideological characteristics or try to explain why and how it emerged.¹¹ This lack of attention derived in large part from the notion that racial equality was empty rhetoric that served the needs of elites to attract the black population to their side during the struggles. That belief was seemingly borne out by the fact that slavery remained legal in most of Spanish America until the 1850s. Adding insult to injury, nationalist declarations of racial equality allowed the elite to maintain informal patterns of discrimination by impeding the formation of racially based political associations, which were declared unnecessary, divisive, and unpatriotic.¹²

A close analysis of this period, however, reveals that the ideal of racial equality was not just facile rhetoric. The literature on the intellectual and electoral history of the Spanish American wars of independence has shown that the political changes were the result of serious intellectual and political debates and were perceived by the protagonists as a momentous transformation that challenged entrenched cultural traditions and social hierarchies.¹³ The works of Alfonso Múnera, Peter Guardino, and Peter Blanchard have also taught us that Afro-Latin Americans were not mere “cannon fodder”; they participated in and influenced the political debates about citizenship in the revolutionary period, sometimes pushing the elites to acquiesce to radical measures they had not initially contemplated.¹⁴ When this approach is ap-

M. Uribe-Uran, ed., *State and Society in Spanish America during the Age of Revolution* (Wilmington, Del., 2001), 219–246.

¹⁰ Victor M. Uribe, “The Enigma of Latin American Independence,” *Latin American Research Review* 32, no. 1 (1997): 236–255, analyzes the “limited impact” of social history in the historiography of the wars of independence.

¹¹ John Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808–1826*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1986), 211–212; Winthrop R. Wright, *Café con Leche: Race, Class, and National Image in Venezuela* (Austin, Tex., 1990), 13–42; Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires*, 42–63; Aline Helg, *Liberty and Equality in Caribbean Colombia, 1770–1835* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004), 6–7, 253–255. See also Lester Langley, *The Americas in the Age of Revolution, 1750–1850* (New Haven, Conn., 1996), 175–177; Jaime E. Rodríguez O., *The Independence of Spanish America* (Cambridge, 1998), 115–116; Eric Van Young, *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Struggle for Mexican Independence, 1810–1821* (Stanford, Calif., 2001), 4.

¹² The best treatment of the myth of racial democracy as a hegemonic construct remains Graham, *The Idea of Race in Latin America*.

¹³ Antonio Annino, ed., *Historia de las elecciones en Iberoamérica, siglo XIX* (Mexico, 1995); David Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (Cambridge, 1991); François-Xavier Guerra, *Modernidad e Independencias ensayos sobre las revoluciones hispánicas* (Madrid, 1992); Manuel Chust, *La cuestión nacional americana en las Cortes de Cádiz (1810–1814)* (Valencia, 1999); Anthony Pagden, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination, 1513–1830* (New Haven, Conn., 1990), 133–153; Eduardo Posada-Carbó, ed., *Elections before Democracy: The History of Elections in Europe and Latin America* (London, 1996); Marie Laure Rieu-Millan, *Los diputados americanos en las cortes de Cádiz* (Madrid, 1990); Rodríguez, *The Independence of Spanish America*; Victor M. Uribe-Uran, *Honorable Lives: Lawyers, Family, and Politics in Colombia, 1780–1850* (Pittsburgh, Pa., 2000).

¹⁴ Alfonso Múnera, “Failing to Construct the Colombian Nation: Race and Class in the Andean Caribbean Conflict, 1717–1816” (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1995); Peter Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico’s National State* (Stanford, Calif., 1996); Peter Blanchard, “The Language of Liberation: Slave Voices in the Wars of Independence,” *Hispanic American Historical Re-*

plied to the myth of racial harmony, it becomes evident that there was nothing predictable or smooth about this process of myth construction. First, consensus regarding racial equality was not immediate. Not only did the white Creole elite have to overcome a colonial tradition that linked social order to racial hierarchies, but they also had to declare racial equality without having a successful example to follow. As contemporary opponents of racial equality pointed out, the United States had shown that a modern republic could coexist with slavery and racial inequality.¹⁵ And in the minds of many white Creoles, racial equality was associated with revolutionary Haiti, hardly an appealing image for them. Second, early republican race relations were charged with deep tensions. In the aftermath of the independence wars, with the emergence of a powerful black political and military class—including generals, congressmen, and senators—and the enfranchisement of a segment of the free black population, *pardos* had developed new expectations of freedom and equality and exerted political pressure that the Creole elite could not ignore. The political future of social and racial relations was unclear, and, as we will see, talks of race war and racial conspiracies had become an integral part of the political imaginary of this period. From this perspective, it seems clear that the future of race relations was one of the most controversial and conflictive problems of the independence period, and the myth of racial harmony was one of the most important political legacies of the Age of Revolution. Indeed, the question arises whether the prominence of the U.S. case has obscured the importance of anticolonial movements in the French and Spanish Americas in shaping modern notions of racial equality and citizenship.¹⁶

The paucity of comparative studies on race during the Age of Revolution is also a product of historians' tendency to focus on colonial slavery or on twentieth-century race relations. Even the comparative works of Anthony Marx and Rebecca Scott on postemancipation societies analyze the later part of the nineteenth century—Reconstruction (1866–1877), the Cuban wars of independence (1865–1898), and Brazilian manumission (1888).¹⁷ This focus, which is a reflection of the weight and rich-

view (hereafter *HAHR*) 82, no. 3 (2002): 499–523. See also Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires*, 42–113; Seth Meisel, “From Slave to Citizen-Soldier in Early Independence Argentina,” *Historical Reflections* 29, no. 1 (2003): 65–82; Camilla Townsend, “‘Half of My Body Free, the Other Half Enslaved’: The Politics of the Slaves of Guayas at the End of the Colonial Era,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 7, no. 1 (1998): 105–128; Silvia C. Mallo, “La Libertad en el discurso del estado, de amos y esclavos, 1780–1830,” *Revista Historia de América* 112 (1991): 121–146. For Brazil, see Hendrik Kraay, “‘As Terrifying as Unexpected’: The Bahian Sabinada, 1837–1838,” *HAHR* 72, no. 4 (1992): 501–526.

¹⁵ September 7, 1811, in *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Generales y Extraordinarias* (Madrid, 1870), 3: 1796; July 31, 1811, *Libro de Actas del Supremo Congreso de Venezuela, 1811–1812* (Caracas, 1959), 254.

¹⁶ I am inspired by works on the French Caribbean that set the debates about manumission and racial equality at the center of analysis of the Age of Revolution. David Geggus, “Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession during the Constituent Assembly,” *AHR* 94, no. 5 (December 1989): 1290–1308; Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1996).

¹⁷ Marx, *Making Race and Nation*; Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2000). See also George Reid Andrews, “Brazilian Racial Democracy, 1900–1990: An American Counterpoint,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 31 (1996): 3, 483–507; Thomas E. Skidmore, “Racial Mixture and Affirmative Action: The Cases of Brazil and the United States,” *AHR* 108, no. 5 (December 2003): 1391–1396; Darién Davis, *Slavery and Beyond: The African Impact on Latin America and the Caribbean* (Wilmington, Del., 1995); Suzanne Bost, *Mulattas and Mestizas: Representing Mixed Identities in the Amer-*

ness of the scholarship on Brazil, Cuba, and the United States, has tended to leave out the anticolonial struggles of the Age of Revolution. Studies on the history of the myth of racial democracy in Spanish America usually begin with the Cuban liberator José Martí and his call for a republic “with all and for all” in the 1890s.¹⁸ Yet this myth emerged in the 1810s and 1820s, during the Spanish American wars of independence.¹⁹ Indeed, when the Cuban liberators made racial equality a fundamental slogan of the patriot camp, they were not inventing a novel concept but were building on an entrenched Spanish American tradition that linked patriot nationalism with racial equality. Pushing the origins of the myth of racial democracy back a few decades does more than set the chronology straight; it conditions the nature of research questions and answers. It means shifting the question from how the myth of racial democracy worked once it was established to asking how it was created in the first place.²⁰

This essay looks at the construction of the myth of racial harmony by examining the relationship between race, war, and nation from two different perspectives. The first part examines how racial equality evolved during the wars of independence from a belief shared by a few American and Spanish radicals into a fundamental patriot nationalist construct that neatly distinguished patriot equality and Spanish inequality. The second part examines the emergence of the phantom of race war and its impact on racial constructs. Specifically, it analyzes how the explicit expression of racial grievances became a mark of unpatriotic divisiveness. This second process was

icas, 1850–2000 (Athens, Ga., 2003); Marilyn Grace Miller, *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America* (Austin, Tex., 2004); Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod, eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora* (Bloomington, Ind., 1999); Jane Landers, ed., *Against the Odds: Free Blacks in the Slave Societies of the Americas* (Portland, Ore., 1996); Norman E. Whitten, Jr., and Arlene Torres, *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean: Social Dynamics and Cultural Transformations* (Bloomington, Ind., 1998).

¹⁸ Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001); Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999); Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1995). Similarly, Emilia Viotti da Costa has explained how “the myth of racial democracy was created and destroyed,” tracing its origins to the 1930s. According to her, the origins of the myth emerged from a need on the part of the traditional planter elite, who felt besieged by a new social force: working-class, modern Pulista elites who mocked the past. Gilberto Freyre sought to confront the new modernizing forces with a positive aspect of Brazilian tradition: racial democracy. Emilia Viotti da Costa, *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2000), 234–246.

¹⁹ Similarly, John Wood Sweet has argued that modern segregation patterns were first established in the North during the revolutionary era. Sweet, *Body Politics: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730–1830* (Baltimore, Md., 2003).

²⁰ For example, in her excellent comparison of postabolition Louisiana and Cuba, Rebecca J. Scott is able to use the Cuban patriot ideology of racial equality as one of the factors that explain differences in race and labor relations, but is unable to explain how this factor itself emerged. Rebecca J. Scott, “Fault Lines, Color Lines, and Party Lines: Race, Labor, and Collective Action in Louisiana and Cuba, 1862–1912,” in Scott, *Beyond Slavery*, 61–106. Even works that look explicitly at the connection between nationalism and race in Latin America are more concerned with understanding how modern racial identities work once they are in place than with asking how they emerged. Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, eds., *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003). There is a large and rich literature on modern racial identities. For Colombia, see Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia* (Baltimore, Md., 1993); Nancy P. Appelbaum, *Muddied Waters: Race, Region, and Local History in Colombia, 1846–1948* (Durham, N.C., 2003); Jaime Arocha, “Inclusion of Afro-Colombians: Unreachable National Goal?” *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (1998): 70–89; James Sanders, *Contentious Republicans: Popular Politics, Race, and Class in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham, N.C., 2004).

not a corollary of the first, as the linkage between racial equality and nationalism per se did not exclude the expression of grievances. The ideal of racial harmony and equality had the potential either to empower those who were disenfranchised or to keep them in their place. The question was who controlled the concept. The answer was not immediate, but was itself a product of contestation as *pardos* sought to express racial grievances in the name of achieving racial equality, while elites criminalized those grievances, claiming that the ideal had already been achieved.²¹

The province of Cartagena, in Caribbean Colombia, was a crucial theater of the independence struggles, in which people of African descent—a demographic majority—played a key political and military role. During most of the period covered here, it formed part of a territory larger than contemporary Colombia. In late colonial times, Cartagena was part of the Viceroyalty of New Granada, which included today's Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela. From independence in 1821 until 1830, it was part of the new Republic of Colombia, which then included the regions administered by the old Viceroyalty of New Granada, what historians today call "La Gran Colombia." Thus, the foundation of Cartagena's racial imaginaries was linked to this wider political area. Colombians joined with Venezuelans in the patriot army and traveled back and forth from one region to the other. As in Venezuela, in Cartagena the loyalty—or lack thereof—of people of African descent was key to the success or failure of the patriot army; and like Venezuela, Caribbean Colombia contributed some of the most important black officers and heroes of the independence era.²²

ONE OF THE MOST FASCINATING ASPECTS of Colombia's declaration of racial equality for all free people was how fast it became a core element of Colombian patriotism, particularly considering that in the last decades of colonial rule there was little in the attitudes of white Creoles that foreshadowed the crucial role that racial equality would play in patriot nationalism. Most white Creoles were little inclined to renounce their traditional racial privileges and strongly opposed the Bourbons' minor reforms in favor of people of African descent. *Pardos'* claims for a greater degree of social inclusion were usually supported by peninsular officers, who prized *pardos'* economic and military contribution to the crown and contrasted their obedience and loyalty to the arrogance and discontent of white Creoles. Most elite Creoles did not share Spanish bureaucrats' view of *pardos*. In Cartagena, white Creoles fought against the crown's decision to grant black militias the corporate legal privileges of the military. They bitterly resented losing jurisdiction over an important segment of the urban population, and they worried about the effect that their diminished powers of social control would have on established social hierarchies. White Creoles also

²¹ Alejandro de la Fuente has noticed similar conflicts between the elite and Afro-Cubans over the meaning and implications of the nationalist myth of racial democracy in postindependence Cuba. De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 28–30.

²² German Carrera Damas, *Boves: Aspectos Socioeconómicos de la guerra de independencia* (Caracas, 1968); Eleazar Córdova Bello, *La independencia de Haití y su influencia en Hispanoamérica* (Caracas, 1967); Francisco Zuluaga, *Guerrilla y Sociedad en el Patía* (Cali, 1993); Múnera, "Failing to Construct the Colombian Nation."



Gran Colombia

opposed the attempts of wealthy *pardos* to enter professions barred to nonwhites.²³ One of the most eloquent examples of their opposition was the Caracas town council's memorandum against the 1795 publication of the *Gracias al Sacar*, a legal procedure that permitted people of African descent to buy their whiteness.²⁴ The council argued for the "necessity to keep *pardos* in their current subordinate status, without any law that would confuse them with whites, who abhor and detest this union."²⁵ According to the town council, the crown decree was the result of false and evil-intentioned reports from Spanish officers in the Americas who did not care about the interests of Spanish American subjects (*españoles americanos*).²⁶ A particularly sore point for Creoles was the Spanish notion that American whites were rarely free from racial mixing, which justified the blurring of racial distinctions in the American

²³ For an analysis of the conflicts between Spanish authorities and the town councils of Cartagena, Guayaquil, and Panama over the *pardos'* fuero, see Allan Kuethe, "The Status of the Free *Pardo* in the Disciplined Militia of New Granada," *Journal of Negro History* 56 (1971): 105–117. For comments on *pardos'* military loyalty vis-à-vis Creoles' increasing dissatisfaction, see Kuethe, *Military Reform*, 165–183, and Archivo General de Simancas, Secretaría de Guerra, 7069, Exp. 36-1, fols. 1–6. The question of whether a *pardo* novice should become a regular nun in the Cartagena convent of Santa Clara led to similar conflicts between Creoles and Spanish bureaucrats; Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI), Santa Fe, 997. For a comparable conflict over whether Cristobal Polo, a *pardo* lawyer, should practice in Cartagena, see Múnera, "Failing to Construct the Colombian Nation," 112. On changing Spanish racial attitudes in the late eighteenth century, see Frank K. Safford, "Race, Integration, and Progress: Elite Attitudes and the Indian in Colombia, 1750–1870," *HAHR* 71, no. 1 (1991): 1–33.

²⁴ Magnus Mörner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (Boston, 1967), 60–70; Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions*, 21–24.

²⁵ "Informe que el Ayuntamiento de Caracas hace la Rey de España referente a la Real Cédula de 10 febrero de 1795," November 28, 1796, in José Félix Blanco, ed., *Documentos para la historia de la vida pública del Libertador* (Caracas, 1875–1878), 293.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 292.

colonies. According to the viceroy of New Granada, Cartagena's white militiamen were "*blancos de la tierra* [local whites], who in substance are mulattos a little closer to our race."²⁷ White Creoles dreaded this notion, because it created a distance between them and peninsular Spaniards, further emphasizing their increasingly disadvantageous position.²⁸ Indeed, white Creoles understood Spanish support of *pardos* as a sign of contempt toward them, and considered it to have been invented "to de-authorize them under the false pretense that it serves the interest of His Majesty."²⁹

Inspired by the French and Haitian Revolution, however, a few white Creoles began to question the soundness of entrenched racial hierarchies. One of the most learned men of the viceroyalty, the wealthy and powerful Cartagenero José Ignacio Pombo, sought to avoid a scenario reminiscent of Haiti by abolishing slavery and eliminating racial distinctions among the commoner class (but maintaining the traditional privileges of the nobility).³⁰ More radically, in 1797 a multiethnic republican conspiracy in the port city of La Guaira envisioned a nation without racial distinctions. Its ordinances abolished slavery and declared "the natural equality of all inhabitants of these provinces . . . [demanding] that the greatest harmony reign among whites, Indians, *pardos* and blacks, . . . seeking to better one another solely in merit and virtue, which are the only true and real distinctions between men and the only ones that shall be present in our republic."³¹

For the first time in the Viceroyalty of New Granada, racial equality and republican patriotism became intrinsically linked. Although the intimated connection between republican virtue, nationalism, and racial equality present in this document would later become the mainstay of patriot racial rhetoric, in 1797 it still belonged to a radical and marginal political imaginary. Like the Haitian-inspired slave revolts of the period, this conspiracy met with exemplary repression, and most white Creoles did not espouse its vision of racial equality.³²

Between 1810 and 1821, a critical ideological and political change took place in the Spanish Empire. No longer just the goal of a few American and Spanish radicals, full citizenship for people of African descent became the undisputed racial ideology among patriots and one of the main issues dividing Spanish from American patriots. From then on, patriots would claim to be the only supporters of racial equality, thereby linking racial harmony and equality to American nationalism. The catalyst

²⁷ Archivo General de Simancas, Secretaría de Guerra, 7069, Exp. 36-1, fols. 1–6.

²⁸ Creoles had already confronted Cornelius de Pauw's and Georges-Louis Leclerc Buffon's theories of Americans' natural inferiority, and they saw themselves increasingly pushed aside from positions of power. Brading, *The First America*, 428–432; Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions*, 1–37.

²⁹ "Informe que el Ayuntamiento de Caracas," 293.

³⁰ José Ignacio de Pombo, *Comercio y contrabando en Cartagena de Indias* (Bogotá, 1986; orig. written June 2, 1800), 57–58. Anthony McFarlane, *Colombia before Independence: Economy, Society, and Politics under Bourbon Rule* (Cambridge, 1993), 311–314; Alfonso Múnera, *Fronteras imaginadas: La construcción de las razas y de la geografía en el siglo XIX colombiano* (Bogotá, 2005), 45–88.

³¹ "Ordenanzas de la Conspiración de Gual y España," in Pedro Grases, *La Conspiración de Gual y España y el Ideario de la Independencia* (Caracas, 1996), 175–176.

³² For Haitian-inspired slave conspiracies in Cartagena, see AGI, Estado, 53, no. 77, fols. 1–2; Kuethe, *Military Reform and Society*, 141–143; Aline Helg, "A Fragmented Majority: Free 'of All Colors,' Indians, and Slaves in Caribbean Colombia during the Haitian Revolution," in David Geggus, ed., *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia, S.C., 2001). For Venezuela, see Federico Brito Figueroa, *Las insurrecciones de los esclavos negros en la sociedad colonial venezolana* (Caracas, 1961), 72–76; Pedro M. Arcaya, *Insurrección de los negros de la Serranía de Coro* (Caracas, 1949).

for this change was Napoleon's invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 1808 and the imprisonment of King Ferdinand VII, which generated a crisis of legitimacy that would eventually lead to the independence of continental Spanish America by 1824.³³ Of special importance to the consolidation of racial equality as an element of patriot nationalism was the calling of a *Cortes* (congress) in the rebel city of Cádiz, where representatives from across the Spanish Empire would meet from 1810 to 1814 to design a modern constitution. Among the sweeping transformations enacted there, the restructuring of metropolitan-colonial relations was of special importance for Spanish-American race relations. In 1809, the Spanish rebel government had abolished the colonial status of overseas territories by declaring them an integral part of a single Spanish nation. Yet when the *Cortes* gathered in 1810, it was not clear to what extent Spaniards were willing to accept Americans' equality.³⁴ Would Americans enjoy the same representation rights as Spaniards? The answer to this question soon took on racial overtones, as the proportion of American representatives depended on whether Indians, blacks, and people of mixed descent were to be counted as citizens. Although Spanish representatives soon agreed to grant citizenship rights to Indians, they refused those rights to men of African descent, theoretically excluding the *castas* (free people of mixed descent) who constituted the majority of the American population.

The linkage between American representation and the citizenship rights of people of African descent would have enormous and unintended consequences. Unlike the constitutional debates in the United States about southern representation, in which the counting of a slave as three-fifths of a white person was linked to slavery as a source of planters' wealth and taxation and not to blacks' citizenship, the representation of *pardos* at Cádiz became tied to their enjoyment of full political rights as citizens.³⁵ Thus, the defense of *pardo* citizenship forced American deputies to challenge traditional justifications for racial hierarchies, to exalt *pardos*' contributions to the nation, and to prove that harmony, not conflict, characterized their racially heterogeneous regions. For example, some American deputies overturned the curse of illegitimacy that had traditionally characterized the discourse about people of mixed racial descent by presenting interracial sexual relations as cheerful proof of interracial harmony.³⁶ Others extolled at length *pardos*' toil as agricultural laborers, their contributions as craftsmen, and their invaluable role as militiamen.³⁷ One went so far as to say that in America "our *castas* are the depository of all our happiness."³⁸ According to another deputy's idyllic picture, whites and blacks were nursed together by black women, from whom they learned to love one another.³⁹

³³ For an analysis of the Spanish American wars of independence, see Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions*; Guerra, *Modernidad e Independencias*; Rodríguez, *The Independence of Spanish America*.

³⁴ Chust, *La cuestión nacional americana*, 32, 52.

³⁵ The best analysis of Cádiz debates over *pardo* representation remains James F. King, "The Colored Castas and American Representation in the Cortes of Cádiz," *HAHR* 33, no. 1 (1953): 33–64. See also Rieu-Millan, *Los diputados americanos*, 152–173; Chust, *La cuestión nacional*, 53–73, 150–173. For the United States, I am relying on Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* (London, 1988), 122–126.

³⁶ September 6, 1811, *Diario de Sesiones*, 3: 1789–1790.

³⁷ September 7, 1811, *ibid.*, 1799; Chust, *La cuestión nacional*, 153–173.

³⁸ "Carta 6a de Juan Sintierra sobre un artículo de la Nueva Constitución de España," *El Español*, October 30, 1811.

³⁹ September 7, 1811, *Diario de Sesiones*, 3: 1798.

These discussions were widely followed throughout the Spanish world. From Mexico to Argentina, local newspapers discussed the debates emphasizing Spanish refusal to grant Americans their fair representation rights.⁴⁰

What made Cádiz a foundational moment for the history of modern race relations in Spanish America is that racial equality became emotionally linked to American patriotism there. This is not to say that without Cádiz, patriots would not have granted legal equality to people of African descent, but rather that because of Cádiz, Americans learned to link racial equality with patriotism and racial inequality with Spanish oppression. Had the *Cortes* conceded citizenship rights to people of African descent, racial equality could well have become an issue that divided liberals from conservatives regardless of nationality. Like other radical patriot ideals, it eventually might have become a source of contention among Colombians, just as happened with issues such as the separation of church and state. But the Spanish chose not to grant such rights, which created a clear contrast between them and the Americans on this issue. Thereafter, patriots could claim to be the only advocates of racial equality. What started as a tactical attempt to secure more representatives had become a powerful nationalist construct that endowed racial equality with all the emotional appeal of patriot nationalism.⁴¹

While representatives debated at Cádiz, *pardos* and elite Creoles joined together in patriot conspiracies to overthrow the Spanish authorities. In Cartagena, as in other Spanish American cities, the crisis of legitimacy of the Spanish Empire led to struggles between Spaniards and Creoles over the control of local government. In regions where *pardos* were the majority of the population, both Spaniards and Creoles were keenly aware of the importance of their support. For example, in the city of Cartagena, *pardo* artisans and white Creoles deposed the Spanish authorities in the name of the people and established a patriot junta.⁴² Without waiting for Cádiz legislation, Cartagena's electoral instructions included all races on equal terms as early as De-

⁴⁰ Newspapers, particularly the London-based *El Español*, had a crucial influence on opinions about the debates. On the importance of the *Cortes* and its debates for Spanish-American politics, see Rodríguez, *The Independence of Spanish America*, 82–103; Guerra, *Modernidad e Independencias*; Brading, *The First America*, 573–577. For Cartagena, Alfonso Múnera has noted that in Cartagena in 1811, the newspaper *El Argos Americano* reproduced fragments of *El Español* coverage of the Cádiz debates. Múnera, "Failing to Construct the Colombian Nation," 237. In her analysis of the Cádiz debates, Tamar Herzog examines the legal and historical basis for the denial of citizen status to people of African descent in the Spanish constitution, but does not note the divisions between Spaniards and Spanish Americans on this subject, and the fact that the Spanish American constitutions of this period recognized individuals of African descent as citizens. Herzog, *Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America* (New Haven, Conn., 2003), 158–163.

⁴¹ I examine these arguments in further detail in Marixa Lasso, "A Republican Myth of Racial Harmony: Race and Patriotism in Colombia, 1810–1812," *Historical Reflections* 29, no. 1 (2003): 43–63.

⁴² Alfonso Múnera was the first modern historian to recognize the crucial importance of *pardo* artisans in Cartagena's independence. Múnera, "Failing to Construct the Colombian Nation," 237–240. See also Marixa Lasso, "Revisiting Independence Day: Afro-Colombian Politics and Patriot Narratives, Cartagena, 1809–1815," in Mark Thurner and Andres Guerrero, eds., *After Spanish Rule: Postcolonial Predicaments of the Americas* (Durham, N.C., 2003), and Helg, *Liberty and Equality*, 121–161. This pattern of securing *pardo* alliance for urban patriot conspiracies continued until the very end of the independence struggle. In 1819, the Spanish authorities discovered a patriot conspiracy in Mompoix in which members of the Creole elite participated with *zambo* artisans. "Testimonio de lo que resulta de la Causa Principal contra Don José Manuel de la Paz, Administrador General de Tabacos de la Villa de Mompoix: Indiciado de haber entrado en la conspiración tramada en Mompoix contra las armas del Rey," AGI, Cuba 719 A. Similarly, the list of patriot conspirators in 1819 Ocaña includes men and women, whites and blacks, free people and slaves. "Relación de las personas que resultaron cómplices

ember 1810. The instructions proclaimed: “all [male] parishioners, whites, Indians, *mestizos*, mulattos, *zambos*, and blacks, as long as they are household heads and earn a living from their own work [thus including numerous artisans], are to be summoned for elections.” Only “vagrants, criminals, those who are in servile salaried status, and slaves are excluded.”⁴³

In other places, the alliance between *pardos* and patriots had to wait a little longer. In the crucial war theater of Los Llanos, *pardos* first joined the Spaniards, their traditional allies, against local elites. By 1816, however, most *llaneros* had gone over to the patriot side. Among the issues motivating this shift were a change in the Spanish leadership that ended its formerly populist character and the emergence of a popular patriot leadership that now included *pardos* and *mestizos* such as José Manuel Piar and José Antonio Paez. Equally important was the effective use by patriot propagandists of Spanish rejection of *pardo* citizenship.⁴⁴ According to a Spanish officer who visited the patriot troops of General Paez in 1820, one of the reasons listed by the soldiers for siding with the patriots was that “the Spanish constitution is unacceptable to them because it denies citizenship to those of African descent.”⁴⁵

By then, racial equality was firmly established in the patriot camp. Patriot speeches now reminded black soldiers of how “Spain . . . had completely denied [citizenship rights] to men of color” and invited them to “unite and give Europe an example of fraternity.”⁴⁶ If *pardo* citizenship was still a subject of debate at the 1811 Congress of Venezuela, by the 1819 Congress of Angostura (the first constitutional congress for Gran Colombia) it was no longer discussed, and it never would be again.⁴⁷ Although the social implications of legal equality would immediately become the subject of great tension and conflict, at least legally and rhetorically, *pardos* had acquired indisputable rights as “the people.”

In the years following independence, the new Colombian government expanded and further popularized the idea of American racial harmony through public ceremonies, newspaper articles, judicial regulations, and congressional debates. Similar to today’s myth of racial democracy, early republican notions of racial harmony were

en la sorpresa y asesinato verificados en esta ciudad de Ocaña el 10 de Noviembre de 1819,” AGI, Cuba 719 A.

⁴³ “Instrucciones que deberán observarse en las elecciones parroquiales, en las de partido y en las capitulares, para el nombramiento de diputados en la Suprema Junta de la provincia de Cartagena,” December 11, 1810, in Manuel Ezequiel Corrales, comp., *Efemérides y anales del Estado de Bolívar* (Bogotá, 1889), 2: 48.

⁴⁴ For the use of Cádiz for war propaganda in Venezuela, see James King, “A Royalist View of the Colored Castes in the Venezuelan Wars of Independence,” *HAHR* 33, no. 4 (1953): 527–537.

⁴⁵ “Declaración de los capitanes Don Juan Jaldon y Don Andrés María Alvarez sobre lo ocurrido en su enviada a San Juan de Pyra para tratar con el Jefe disidente Paez,” August 5, 1820, AGI, Indiferente, 1568.

⁴⁶ “Proclama de José Francisco Bermúdez,” Cartagena, August 8, 1815, Archivo Histórico Nacional de Colombia (hereafter AHNC), Archivo Restrepo, rollo 5, fol. 179. See also Simón Bolívar, “A los pueblos de Venezuela,” Guyana, August 5, 1817, in Bolívar, *Obras Completas* (Madrid, 1960), 647; Bolívar, “A los Soldados del Ejército Libertador,” October 17, 1817, in Daniel Florencio O’Leary, *Memorias del General O’Leary* (Caracas, 1884), 15: 423–424.

⁴⁷ See, for example, the 1811 Venezuelan congressional debates over whether the constitution should explicitly eliminate any racial distinctions between blacks and whites. *Libro de actas del Supremo Congreso de Venezuela*, 254–262, and Manuel A. Rodríguez, “Los pardos libres en la colonia y la independencia,” *Boletín de la Academia Nacional de la Historia* 75 (1992): 52.

linked to national identity and racial equality. However, the ideological bases of this nationalist belief were shaped by contemporary political values that were quite different from those of the twentieth century. First, peninsular racial tolerance was not presented as a historical precedent to Colombian racial harmony.⁴⁸ Quite the contrary, the Black Legend of Spanish colonialism—the belief that Spanish rule was particularly tyrannical and obscurantist—was crucial to early republican racial discourse. The Black Legend allowed the erasure of racial conflicts between Americans, who all became fellow victims of Spanish tyranny. It also permitted patriots to envision a new era of republican racial equality, free from Spanish rule. Public speeches, manumission ceremonies, and newspaper articles recounted a history of Spanish despotism and violence that oppressed and divided fellow Americans. In 1817, Simón Bolívar contrasted republican racial equality with Spanish despotism, under which “*pardos* were subjected to the utmost humiliation, deprived of everything. The state of holy priesthood was forbidden to *pardos*: one could say that the Spanish had barred them even from heaven.”⁴⁹ The Spanish, another speaker declared, “after depopulating our country with fire and sword were compelled to commit the equally horrible crime of repopulating it with slaves.”⁵⁰ Even internal bureaucratic correspondence repeated the story of Spanish guilt and patriot innocence. The governor of Cartagena, Mariano Montilla, wrote to the national secretary of war about the reestablishment of local militias, “but without the class distinctions that Spanish tyranny had introduced to foster divisions among Americans.”⁵¹

The Black Legend also shaped contemporary attitudes about slavery. Unlike racial equality, abolition received only scant attention at Cádiz. Most American deputies tended to conveniently ignore the subject.⁵² The 1812 constitution of Cartagena had abolished the slave trade but had left the practice of slavery itself untouched. Thus, it was a burning issue for the new independent state when a constitutional convention gathered in the city of Cúcuta in 1821. At Cúcuta, manumission became the subject of some of the most intense and heated debates. Yet it must be emphasized that not even the most vocal champions of slaveholders defended slavery as an institution.⁵³ There was official agreement that the practice belonged to the past, and that a modern and enlightened nation such as Colombia should not be tainted by it. The question was when and how abolition would take place. Planters’

⁴⁸ Gilberto Freyre’s historical analysis of race relations in colonial Brazil has been instrumental in the popularity of this notion of racial tolerance. As far as I can tell, in Colombia the idea of Spanish racial tolerance was developed in the 1860s by conservative intellectuals who wanted to rescue the positive legacy of Spanish rule, in particular the role of the church. G. de Soroa [pseudonym for Sergio Arboleda], *La República en la América Española* (Bogotá, 1869), 34–35.

⁴⁹ Bolívar, “A los pueblos de Venezuela,” 647.

⁵⁰ This speech, which was delivered in Mompox during the Independence Day celebrations of December 1823, was printed in *Gaceta de Cartagena de Colombia* on January 17, 1824.

⁵¹ Mariano Montilla to Sr. Secretario de Guerra y Marina, Cartagena, May 10, 1822, AHNC, República, Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, t. 14, fol. 317.

⁵² Chust, *La cuestión nacional*, 102.

⁵³ Jaime Jaramillo Uribe, “La controversia jurídica y filosófica, librada en la Nueva Granada en torno a la liberación de los esclavos y la importancia económica y social de la esclavitud en el siglo XIX,” *Anuario de Historia Social y de la Cultura* 4 (1969): 76–80; *Observaciones de G.T. sobre la ley de manumisión del soberano Congreso de Colombia* (Bogotá, 1822), in Colección de Libros Raros y Manuscritos Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango; “Los Hacendados y Vecinos de la Provincia de Cartagena de Colombia al Congreso,” November 30, 1822, Archivo Legislativo del Congreso de Colombia, Cámara, Peticiones, t. 33, fols. 24–31.

supporters argued that although abolition was desirable, property rights would be violated and the economy dramatically damaged if slaves were suddenly manumitted. After a series of long and passionate debates, the 1821 constitutional congress decreed a free-womb law, which ensured that no more slaves would be born on Colombian soil. *Libertos* (children born after 1821 to slave parents) had to work for their mothers' owners until they were eighteen years old, to pay back the maintenance costs that had allegedly been incurred in raising them. In addition, the congress established *juntas de manumisión* (manumission boards) with the intention of accelerating the manumission process through the creation of a fund to buy slaves born in captivity. Slavery, however, would remain legal until January 1852. During the 1821 constitutional debates, manumission was officially declared a nationalist and republican virtue.⁵⁴ A medal of *Benemérito de la Humanidad* was proposed for those who manumitted more than ten slaves. In the heat of the debates, six congressmen freed all their slaves amid public applause. The congress president stated that Colombia was more virtuous than the ancient republics of Rome, Sparta, and Athens, because its representatives did not merely content themselves with a theoretical love for justice, which was rather easy, but took pleasure in following its mandates.⁵⁵

With the creation of the new manumission boards, the Colombian state established a crucial space for spreading its notions of race, nation, and citizenship. Historians have characterized the *juntas de manumisión* as ineffective institutions that tried to hide the crude reality of slavery. Indeed, the boards were responsible for freeing very few slaves.⁵⁶ Yet they were important, not because of the number of slaves who gained freedom as a result, but because they associated manumission with Colombian nationalism, linking slavery to Spanish tyranny and manumission to republican virtue. Prominent citizens were asked to demonstrate their patriotism by helping to fund the *juntas*. Contributors' names and donations were duly mentioned in the ceremonies and published in local newspapers. Moreover, individual slave owners conducted their private manumissions at these official commemorations of independence. Thus, acts that had previously been presented as Christian charity were now portrayed as signs of "love for national independence and the republican constitutional system."⁵⁷

The Independence Day celebrations of the 1820s provided a crucial space for linking the transformation of slaves into citizens to the birth of the republic. The law required manumission boards to free slaves during national festivities, making such ceremonies a central part of these elaborate celebrations.⁵⁸ In 1825, for example, the independence festivities in Cartagena began with a *Te Deum*, immediately followed by the *juntas*' manumission of four slaves in the "Temple of Liberty," a splendidly

⁵⁴ *Actas del Congreso de Cúcuta 1821* (Bogotá, 1989), 1: 97.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 219–220.

⁵⁶ To my knowledge, there is no account of the total number of slaves manumitted by the *juntas*. However, available descriptions indicate that the *juntas* played only a symbolic role in the manumission process. Harold A. Bierck, Jr., "The Struggle for Abolition in Gran Colombia," *HAHR* 33, no. 3 (1953): 373–378; Margarita González, "El proceso de manumisión en Colombia," *Cuadernos Colombianos* 2 (1974): 196.

⁵⁷ *Gaceta de Cartagena de Colombia*, January 29, 1825. For an analysis of manumission and state building in contemporary Argentina, see Meisel, "From Slave to Citizen-Soldier," 65–82.

⁵⁸ Article 12 of the manumission law of July 19, 1821, decreed that the *juntas* should manumit slaves during national celebrations. *Actas del Congreso de Cúcuta 1821*, 2: 52.

adorned shrine with Doric columns and a cupola crowned by a bust of Liberty.⁵⁹ In 1823, the manumission ceremony in the city of Mompox had taken place on a damask-lined stage, with the chosen slave wearing a liberty cap. These ceremonies were accompanied by passionate speeches outlining their significance. The speeches officially acknowledged the debased nature of slavery, yet Colombians were declared innocent of this crime against humanity: it was Spanish greed and violence that had brought slaves to America. Colombia had granted slaves their natural freedom, “the freedom that nature had given them but which European ambition had deprived them of.”⁶⁰ Colombians proudly considered themselves a model for others to follow. “In the theater of nations, Colombia shone for her philanthropy and enlightenment,” a manumission speech proclaimed.⁶¹ Although Colombians did not go as far as Haitians in making abolition a core element of their national identity, it was an essential part of their new republican identity. Thus, manumission did not become the source of deep and lasting regional divisions that it was in the United States.⁶²

A second element of early nationalist notions of racial harmony was unity. Early republican authorities believed they had the daunting task of creating a unified nation out of a region beset by regional and racial divisions. Analyses of this “illusion” of unity have focused on attempts to control regional divisions.⁶³ However, this illusion was as much a matter of racial as of regional integration. As the liberator Simón Bolívar told the legislators in Angostura, “Unity, Unity, Unity, must be our motto in all things. The blood of our citizens is varied: let it be mixed for the sake of unity. Our constitution has divided the powers of government: let them be bound together to secure unity.”⁶⁴ This statement was part of a broader political dichotomy that privileged unity over factionalism, which drew inspiration from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s belief in the inherent antagonism between unity and factions.⁶⁵ For Rousseau, a perfect state was one ruled by the general will, which represented the common interest of society. However, because individual interests often conflicted with the common interest, the sum of the various particular wills did not necessarily reflect the general will. The tension between individual and societal interest was magnified when people ceased to act as individuals and began to vote instead as members of factions. Rousseau believed that factions represented the emergence of specific group interests, which ultimately could lead to the destruction of the state.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ *Gaceta de Cartagena de Colombia*, January 1, 1825.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, January 29, 1825.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, January 1, 1825.

⁶² Although manumission played a crucial role in the 1851 civil war, it did not become a lasting source of regional identification. Sanders, *Contentious Republicans*, 83–124; Alvaro Tirado Mejía, *Aspectos Sociales de las Guerras Civiles en Colombia* (Bogotá, 1976), 14–30; González, “El proceso de manumisión en Colombia,” 235–237.

⁶³ See, for example, Luis Castro Leiva, *La Gran Colombia: Una ilusión ilustrada* (Caracas, 1985), 110, 125.

⁶⁴ Simón Bolívar, “Discurso pronunciado por el Libertador ante el Congreso de Angostura el 15 de febrero de 1819,” in Harold A. Bierck, Jr., *Selected Writings of Bolívar*, trans. Lewis Bertrand (New York, 1951), 2: 191–192.

⁶⁵ For the relevance of this notion for Colombian political ideology, see Castro Leiva, *La Gran Colombia*, 110–115; Castro Leiva, “The Ironies of the Spanish-American Revolutions,” *International Social Science Journal* 41, no. 1 (1989): 53–67; Hilda Sabato, “On Political Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century Latin America,” *AHR* 106, no. 4 (October 2001): 1290–1315, 1301.

⁶⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses* (New York, 1950), 26–28; Castro Leiva, *La Gran Colombia*, 110, 125.

Racial differences were inscribed in these notions. Race facilitated the emergence of factions, which made it all the more difficult to achieve the dream of a society ruled by virtuous citizens. From this perspective, Bolívar's notion of "pardocracy" represented the triumph of a particular faction, the *pardos*, over the unity of the nation. It followed that racial politics equaled factional politics, and as such constituted a threat to the nation. As long as Colombia continued to be divided by race, virtuous politics would be impossible. For the early republican political ideology, citizenship and race were incompatible; the first stood for union and equality, the second for division and antagonism. Thus, the racial policies of this period need to be understood within this overarching goal of eliminating any cause for racial conflict and division, and fostering a nation of citizens, which is to say, a nation of men with equal interests and values.⁶⁷

Another element of the new republican racial ideology was interracial mixing between Europeans, blacks, and Indians. As early as 1819, Bolívar had proposed that national unity could be achieved through racial mixing.⁶⁸ As a path to national unity, it was also an important element of one of the first independence histories of Gran Colombia. Drawing parallels between Spain and Spanish America, this independence narrative highlights how the expulsion of the "Moors" from the Iberian peninsula was achieved not by "the aborigines" but by "a distant generation of mixed blood," whose "right to recover the independence of their country" no one had questioned. The same, the author continued, had happened in Spanish America, but with the difference that "we have not had the time to prevail over the heterogeneous elements and condense a new mass, like the Spanish did in 1600 years." Several elements of this narrative foreshadow later ideologies of *mestizaje*: first, the notion that people of mixed descent embody the nation; second, the idea that racial mixing leads to the creation of a "new mass," a new type of people.⁶⁹ A less neutral view of racial mixing was proposed by Gerónimo Torres. He sought to "extinguish the black race" by sending vagabonds and prostitutes from regions with lighter people to live in regions populated mostly by blacks. This measure would accomplish the double objective of mixing blacks and whites and contributing to the population growth of Colombia.⁷⁰ These projects could be interpreted exclusively as racist attempts to eliminate Colombian racial diversity, but that would be of little help to us in attempting to understand the political values and ideologies that gave coherence to early republican racial policies. This is not to say that racial prejudices were absent among the elite. Quite the contrary, Gerónimo Torres was not afraid to express his negative views of free and slave blacks. Moreover, these projects did not envision racial mixing in neutral terms but were part of a conscious attempt to "whiten" the country. Racial policies have to be understood in relation to broader contemporary notions of citizenship, which could not imagine difference and diversity in positive terms. In the words of the *pardo* intellectual Juan García del Río, "heterogeneity [which, significantly, he linked to caste divisions] was a malefic principle." Colombians could only hope for the benefits of the revolution to take effect and "fuse our

⁶⁷ Castro Leiva, "The Ironies," 59.

⁶⁸ Bierck, *Selected Writings of Bolívar*, 2: 191–192.

⁶⁹ "Independencia," *Gaceta de Cartagena de Colombia*, no. 157 (1824): 2. The *Gaceta de Cartagena* published this history of independence in various segments.

⁷⁰ *Observaciones de G.T.*, 37–38.

population.”⁷¹ For him, as for other Colombian intellectuals and politicians, to imagine Colombians was to imagine citizens with similar interests and values. Thus, confronted with citizens of different colors, early legislators could think either in terms of blending, mixing, and assimilating, or in terms of exclusion.⁷²

The Americas provided different models for “solving” this national problem. One was the U.S. model. The United States had developed ideologies of manifest destiny and white supremacy, which excluded blacks from citizenship, either through schemes for expatriating ex-slaves or by withholding full citizenship rights from free blacks.⁷³ The second model was Haiti, which had initially “solved” conflicts between blacks and mulattos by declaring all its citizens, regardless of color, black by constitutional decree. When the Haitian constitution declared in 1804, “the Haitians will be known under none other than the generic denomination of blacks [*noirs*]”—including in this measure Haitians of all shades, even whites—it also followed an ideological belief in the necessity of a homogeneous citizenry, of eliminating color as a cause of conflict.⁷⁴ Colombia followed yet a different path: blending. This solution skillfully adapted Colombia’s peculiar social and political reality to contemporary notions of nation and citizenship. The war had made the political and legal exclusion of *pardos* impossible, both because of their military power and because of the link between racial equality and patriot nationalism. Racial mixing was one component of the larger project of creating a unified nation of Colombians.

The report to the 1823 congress of Minister of Interior José Manuel Restrepo summarized the strategy and values of early republican projects to eliminate racial conflicts and promote a homogeneous citizenry. He predicted that within sixty years, *castas* would disappear and Colombia would be inhabited only by free men, which he considered a “most pleasing and comforting” perspective. Thus, one of the priorities of the new government was to pass laws that eliminated racial differences through cultural and physical amalgamation, which they hoped would gradually eliminate the colonial legacy of racial conflict and division.⁷⁵ First and foremost, it was

⁷¹ Quote from Múnera, *Fronteras imaginadas*, 148. In the excellent essay “En busca del mestizaje,” Múnera highlights the importance of the idea of *mestizaje* among nineteenth-century Colombian intellectuals.

⁷² This was hardly a problem faced exclusively by Colombians or Spanish Americans. As David Bell shows, French revolutionaries, while invoking the nation, confronted the problem of how to create the Frenchman who did not yet exist. Bell, “The Unbearable Lightness of Being French,” 1215–1235. See also Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 72–86.

⁷³ Since the United States left the legal status of people of African descent to the individual states, legislation varied from the abolition of slavery and granting blacks full citizenship rights to slavery and disenfranchisement of free blacks. For a summary of the various state legislations, see Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 111–127, 267–291; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*; Sweet, *Body Politics*, 314–350.

⁷⁴ This quote from the Haitian constitution comes from Mimi Sheller, *Democracy after Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica* (Gainesville, Fla., 2000), 73. David Nicholls acknowledges the ideological and political dimension of this notion of “black,” which included the hundreds of Polish soldiers who fought with Dessalines. Yet he links it to twentieth-century notions of black liberation rather than to contemporary notions of race, nation, and citizenship. Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, rev. ed. (New Brunswick, N.J., 1996), 35–36. David Geggus points out the use of a shared black identity in contemporary attempts to unify a nation divided by class and color. Yet he also points out that the first constitution represented the only and a very short-lived attempt to stress blackness. Geggus, “The Naming of Haiti,” *New West Indian Guide* 71 (1997): 45–46.

⁷⁵ José Manuel Restrepo, “Memoria que el secretario de estado y del despacho del interior presentó

necessary to abolish colonial laws that fostered racial inequality and antagonism. As part of its policy to promote legal equality, the central government eliminated racial identification from state records.⁷⁶ The free-birth law was the most controversial of such racial legislation. Restrepo told legislators that few laws would have a larger impact on Colombians' future than the free-birth law. Although he acknowledged the economic problems that could derive from it, he asserted that it was a much lesser evil than the inevitable race war that would follow if slavery were maintained.⁷⁷ Manumission was explicitly considered an antidote to race war, and eliminating racial conflict was the guiding principle behind this law. If a racially harmonious citizenry was the goal of manumission, it followed that the former slaves had to become Colombians with full legal rights.⁷⁸ This notion was publicly expressed in manumission ceremonies, which re-created the rebirth of slaves as citizens. During these ceremonies, slaves took an oath to defend the constitution and the laws, and Colombians were asked to "recognize them as compatriots, Colombians, and fellow citizens." In return, the ex-slaves were asked to live as peaceful, law-abiding citizens to show their gratitude to a country that had fought a long and bloody war for their freedom.⁷⁹

Education was another pillar of the state program for creating a nation of (homogeneous) Colombians out of a "racially" diverse population. Legislative projects sought to educate all Colombians, including blacks, by bringing schools to all corners of the republic.⁸⁰ The 1814 constitution of Mariquita, for example, explicitly declared, "no school shall make any distinction between whites, *pardos*, or any other class of people. It is talent and progress in learning that shall distinguish youth in the Republic."⁸¹ The 1821 Colombian constitution was not so explicit, but the 1823 congress clarified that it was unconstitutional to discriminate against *pardos* in admissions to universities or seminaries.⁸² One purpose of these laws was to eliminate yet another legacy of conflict and resentment. Perhaps more important, the inclusion of blacks in the educational system was part of a larger project that sought to unify the mores and values of Colombian citizens and to foster the progress of the nation through an educated and industrious citizenry.

By the 1820s, racial harmony had become so embedded in Colombian nationalism that to deny its desirability would have been like opposing republicanism and favoring the Spanish monarchy. To oppose the notion of racial harmony and equality

al Congreso de Colombia sobre los negocios de su departamento: Año de 1823–13," Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia, Miscelánea no 1,160.

⁷⁶ David Bushnell, *The Santander Regime in Gran Colombia* (Newark, Del., 1954), 173.

⁷⁷ Restrepo, "Memoria que le secretario de estado," 14–15. This theme was recurrent in Bolívar's speeches in favor of abolition. His address to the Congress of Angostura, as well as his constitutional project for Bolivia, expressed his belief in the incompatibility between republicanism and slavery. Bolívar, *Proclamas y Discursos*, 232 and 332.

⁷⁸ The 1821 constitution of the Republic of Colombia declared all free men born in its territory to be Colombians. This constitution did not distinguish between the categories of Colombians and citizens, which were thought to be the same. The difference was established between those who were entitled to vote and those who were not.

⁷⁹ *Gaceta de Cartagena de Colombia*, January 29, 1825.

⁸⁰ Bushnell, *The Santander Regime*, 183–193.

⁸¹ Decree establishing the elementary schools in the cities of Honda, Mariquita, Ibagué, and Ambalema y Espinal, *Boletín de Historia y Antigüedades* 10, no. 109 (May 1915): 78.

⁸² Session of May 16, 1823, *Santander y el Congreso de 1823: Actas correspondencia, senado* (Bogotá, 1989), 3: 67–68.

was to be incapable of one of the most important forms of patriotic love: loving your Colombian brother.⁸³ This is not to deny that some people rejected the idea, just as some remembered with nostalgia the peace and order of Spanish rule and sought to reestablish the monarchy. However, there was a political and personal cost for expressing such opinions publicly.

POLITICAL CONSENSUS ABOUT THE VIRTUES OF RACIAL EQUALITY did not mean agreement on the specific implications that this new equality would have for the political and social relations of Colombian towns. This lack of accord was further complicated by the political and social instability that characterized the war years. Political notions of legitimacy had dramatically changed. Changes in the composition of the political and military elite seemed initially to support the new notions of citizenship and racial equality. Spanish authorities were replaced by Creole authorities, which sometimes included *pardos* who had risen to positions of political and military power during the wars. Moreover, in coastal regions such as Cartagena, *pardos* took seriously the government's declarations of equality, which they saw as an outcome of their own contributions as patriot soldiers in the war against Spain. They actively denounced instances of racial discrimination that contradicted the new republican laws, which some of them interpreted as the end of white social and political control. Finally, although slavery continued to be legal, it was greatly disrupted by the wars. In the province of Cartagena, the number of slaves fell by 50 percent during the course of the independence wars.⁸⁴ Slaves who joined the patriot army were now legally free, and slaves who lived on the numerous haciendas that were abandoned by their owners during the wars had grown accustomed to their de facto freedom.⁸⁵

Nothing expressed the social instability of the period and elite racial anxieties as did the rumors of race war (*guerra de colores*). References to race war were an integral part of the political discourse of early republican Colombia. Vice-President Santander wrote to the minister of interior about the need to create more effective criminal laws to deal with blacks who were "developing projects of domination." According to him, blacks' dangerous behavior and ambitions were "the result of ten years of revolution, during which the foundations of social order have been shaken, while the government has not been able to consolidate itself."⁸⁶ Similarly, in 1823, Minister of Interior Restrepo mentioned in various entries in his private diary a number of conspiracies against whites. He pondered, "it is most probable, and the

⁸³ *Gaceta de Cartagena de Colombia*, June 7, 1823.

⁸⁴ See the 1780 and 1825 censuses for the province of Cartagena in Hermes Tovar Pinzón, *Convocatoria al poder del número: Censos y estadísticas de la Nueva Granada 1750–1830* (Bogotá, 1994).

⁸⁵ On public order and abandoned hacienda slaves, see Gustavo Bell Lemus, "Deserciones, fugas, cimarronajes, rochelas y uniones libres: El problema del control social en la provincia de Cartagena al final del dominio español 1816–1820," in Lemus, *Cartagena de Indias de la colonia a la república* (Bogotá, 1991), chap. 3; Cartagena, March 1816, AGI, Cuba 717. For the congressional dossier on the freedom of slave soldiers, see, for example, Archivo Legislativo del Congreso de Colombia, Senado, Consultas, t. 58, fols. 28 and 45–47. For the impact of the war of independence on slave soldiers, see Blanchard, "The Language of Liberation," 499–523; Meisel, "From Slave to Citizen Soldier," 65–82; Bierck, "The Struggle for Abolition in Gran Colombia," 365–386.

⁸⁶ Francisco de Paula Santander to the Minister of Interior, September 7, 1824, Archivo Legislativo del Congreso de Colombia, Senado, Consultas, t. 58, fols. 43–44.

Liberator always predicts it, that once the war with the Spanish is finished, we will have a new one with the blacks.”⁸⁷ In its secret sessions, the 1823 senate discussed “the dangers racial differences pose to the Republic if the problem is not conveniently solved.”⁸⁸

Fears of race war were not only a concern of the presidency, the senate, and other central authorities in Bogotá, but also a constant worry for local elites. On June 5, 1831, Juan Barbosa, who was traveling from Cartagena to Kingston, wrote in his personal diary, “yesterday I heard a lengthy discussion of great transcendence among the sailors about a conspiracy of blacks in Colombia.” Two days later he wrote again, “the discussion of the previous days continued. This talk, which is encouraged by any Colombian sailor, predicts another Saint Domingue in Colombia.”⁸⁹ Back in Colombia, Barbosa told the authorities about these conversations, providing them with excerpts from his diary, as well as with information about the nature of the sailors’ discussions. Although he denied that such discussions provided grounds for prosecution of the sailors, he thought these conversations “showed the degree to which the notion of revolution was in the minds of all these types of people.”⁹⁰ Barbosa’s account was not unique. It was not the first time, nor would it be the last, that Colombian authorities had received denunciations of race war talks and alleged racial conspiracies. From 1811 to 1828, rumors of race war had surfaced during the trials of politically active *pardos* in Honda, Majagual, Mompo, and Cartagena. In 1832, talk of race war emerged yet again in Caribbean Colombia. In January, two men were executed in the city of Santa Marta for conspiring against whites, while their accomplices were banished from the region.⁹¹ That same month, another *pardo* was executed in Mompo for conspiring to start a revolution of *pardos*, while a man and a woman were banished for not denouncing the conspiracy.⁹² At the same time, race war rumors were spreading in Cartagena, but the governor found no conspiracy.⁹³ One year later, however, fifty *pardo* artisans were denounced for plotting a revolt against whites in Cartagena.⁹⁴

That none of these conspiracies resulted in a race rebellion does not diminish their historical relevance. Quite the contrary, they pose the question of why rumors of race war were so prevalent during this period, what they tell us about contemporary fears and expectations, when and why they were most likely to emerge, and what impact they had on republican racial constructs.⁹⁵ An analysis of the political

⁸⁷ José Manuel Restrepo, March 23, 1823, *Diario político y militar: Memorias sobre los sucesos importantes de la época para servir a la historia de la Revolución de Colombia y de la Nueva Granada, desde 1819 para adelante* (Bogotá, 1954), 1: 211.

⁸⁸ Senate to Santander, June 7, 1823, *Santander y el Congreso de 1823*, 1: 309.

⁸⁹ Ministerio de Interior, t. 1, fol. 155, República, AHNC.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ AHNC, República, Ministerio de Interior, t. 1, fols. 154 and 163.

⁹² *Ibid.*, fols. 5–32.

⁹³ AHNC, República, Gobernación de Cartagena, t. 42, fols. 2–8; AHNC, República, Ministerio de Interior, t. 1, fols. 99–105.

⁹⁴ AHNC, República, Ministerio de Interior, t. 1, fols. 351–353.

⁹⁵ In her analysis of José Padilla, the most prominent and best-known Colombian *pardo* to face race war accusations, Aline Helg emphasizes the relevance of patron-client relations between whites and *pardos* to explain Padilla’s failure to rally enough support in Cartagena. She argues that because of these clientelistic relationships and the appeal of legal racial equality, race-based rebellions were destined to fail. Helg, “Simón Bolívar and the Spectre of *Pardocracia*: José Padilla in Post-Independence Cartagena,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 35, no. 3 (2003): 447–471, and Helg, *Liberty and Equality*,

circumstances surrounding rumors of race war reveals that they surfaced at foundational moments of the revolution when the extent and meaning of revolutionary change and its influence over the power relations between blacks and whites were at stake. In some cases, such rumors began to circulate when *pardos* rose to positions of local authority and tried to impose their authority on the local white elite. This is evident, for example, in the criminal trial against the *pardo* Justice Valentín Arcia for his “criminal aversion toward whites.” According to Justice Arcia, the elite had accused him only because they were “uncomfortable with having him as a judge and being under his command, because he belonged to the class of *pardos*.”⁹⁶ Indeed, the details of the accusations against Arcia reveal an intense struggle over whether a *pardo* carpenter “with no more means of subsistence than his tools” could impose his authority over the local elite. Arcia responded to the elite’s attempt to ignore and hamper his authority by publicly denouncing racial discrimination and warning the local elite of the danger of continuing with such unrepublican practices.⁹⁷ His case, like others in which influential *pardos* were accused of seditious enmity toward whites, reveals conflicts between whites and *pardos* over the implications that their new political power would have for local social relations.⁹⁸

Other racial rumors coincided with major political changes such as the establishment of Creole revolutionary juntas and the calling of constitutional conventions. These constituted veritable foundational moments of the revolutionary era, during which notions such as tyranny, anarchy, demagoguery, equality, and liberty and its implications for social/racial relations were passionately debated. For example, rumors of race war emerged during the First Republic of Cartagena when the congress gathered to elect a governor in 1814. Conflicts between two local factions over who would occupy that office gave rise to rumors about a conspiracy among *pardos* to install one of their own in the governorship.⁹⁹ Rumors of race war also appeared during the 1828 Ocaña convention when *pardos* opposed Bolívar’s constitutional project and denounced instances of racial discrimination.¹⁰⁰ Again in 1831, attempts

195–222. However, since Padilla’s case was only one of a series of alleged racial conspiracies, the question remains why social tensions were expressed in the language of race war during this period. The answer requires analysis of racial conspiracies as a group rather than in isolation, which allows patterns to be observed that are otherwise not apparent.

⁹⁶ “Causa criminal contra Valentín Arcia, alcalde ordinario de segunda nominación de Majagual por hablar mal contra los blancos y contra el gobierno,” AHNC, República, Archivos Criminales, t. 61, fols. 1143–1209, and t. 96, fols. 244–322.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ See, for example, the trials of Colonel and Senator Remigio Márquez and General and Senator José Prudencio Padilla. A detailed analysis of these trials and Arcias’s trial can be found in Marixa Lasso, “Haiti as an Image of Popular Republicanism in Caribbean Colombia, Cartagena Province (1811–1830),” in Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, 178–186, and Lasso, “Race and Republicanism in the Age of Revolution, Cartagena 1795–1831” (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 2002), 133–168. For a different interpretation of Padilla’s case, see Helg, *Liberty and Equality*, 195–223.

⁹⁹ José Salvador de Narváez, “Operaciones del Ejército de Cartagena situado en la línea occidental del río Magdalena, desde el 22 de diciembre de 1814 hasta el 18 de enero de 1815, con motivo de lo ocurrido en el Colegio electoral y Revisor el 17 de diciembre citado,” January 30, 1815, in Manuel Ezequiel Corrales, *Efemérides y anales del Estado de Bolívar* (Bogotá, 1889), 2: 172–176. Pedro Gual, “Primer oficio del gobernador de la provincia al secretario del Estado y Relaciones Exteriores del Gobierno de la Unión,” January 30, 1815, AHNC, Restrepo, rollo 5, fols. 115–116.

¹⁰⁰ “Cartagena, Sumaria averiguación para aclarar asuntos relacionados con la seguridad pública y

by local radical liberals to redefine Cartagena's power relations were inscribed in the language of race war. In short, rumors of race war coincided with moments in which national or local political changes promoted acute conflicts and negotiations over racial, social, and political relations.¹⁰¹

Underlying most of the alleged racial conspiracies was pressure from *pardos* to force the elite to fulfill their promises of racial equality. Although the two sides were in agreement about the virtues and desirability of racial harmony and equality, they had quite different perspectives on the contemporary reality of this republican ideal. In contrast to the elites, *pardos* did not think that their political struggle for equality had ended. Again and again, they complained about persisting practices of racial discrimination. The language in which they expressed their grievances can be fully appreciated in the following satirical denunciation of racial discrimination in a café in the city of Cartagena, which a *pardo* artisan publicized in a printed pamphlet:¹⁰²

WARNING

In the café of Mr. Cayetano Corrales on Saint Augustine Street, everybody's money is welcome; but only men of high status (those called *whites*) can sit down, converse and play cards, and come and go as they please, because they have money or blue blood. An honest, decent artisan who does not enjoy those eminent qualities and characteristics can leave his money, but then he himself must immediately leave, because it would be a sacrilegious impertinence to stay in the company of such distinguished men. Long live the aristocracy, long live the arrogance of the fatuous and the foolish such as Mr. Corrales, and death to him who, without being *white*, lacking blue blood or epaulettes, shamefully goes in and allows himself to be insulted and scorned for staying.

AN HONEST *PARDO*

This pamphlet uses the language of racial grievances voiced by most *pardos* accused of racial enmity against whites. A salient characteristic is its emphasis on the aristocratic nature of racial inequality, which was a recurrent theme of early republican racial language. To discriminate against honest *pardos* was a sign of arrogant aristocratic behavior. The pamphlet contrasted the "vanity," "blue blood," and "high status" of those who discriminated against *pardos* with the "decency" of the victimized artisans, who embodied the republican values of work and honesty. Secondly, the author was willing to use racial terms and identification. He associated the labels "*pardo*" and "*white*" with archaic aristocratic values. However, because experience had shown him that they had not yet been relegated to the past, he publicly used them to expose discrimination. He was unwilling to bury and silence race as long as it continued to be used to discriminate against *pardos*. Thus, the "honest *pardo*" openly spoke out against the arrogant whites who refused to seat *pardos* in their cafés. Cartagena's judicial authorities declared the pamphlet signed by an "honest *pardo*" to be a "subversive publication," and the author, Agustín Martínez, was

con la subordinación y disciplina en las clases del ejército," AHNC, República, Archivos Criminales, t. 44, fols. 86–118.

¹⁰¹ I further analyze the context of these cases in Lasso, "Race and Republicanism during the Age of Revolution," 89–201.

¹⁰² AHNC, República, Gobernación de Cartagena, 42, fol. 5.

accused of sedition and banished for two years.¹⁰³ He learned the hard way that it was dangerous to seek public redress of racial discrimination.

Martínez's experience was not unique. Other *pardos* who were willing to denounce racial discrimination encountered similar problems. This can be observed among a group of artisans who had gathered to celebrate a baptism. They discussed the discrimination against *pardos* by local authorities. One of them stated, "when a white fights with a black, the black goes to jail, while the white walks away laughing."¹⁰⁴ Another told his fellow artisans that "their economic difficulties were caused not by the city's monetary problems but by the actions of eight or ten whites."¹⁰⁵ As a result, fifty of them were jailed for "trying to rob, murder, and maybe even destroy the government." When the government decided that the alleged conspiracy was merely an act of drunkenness, they were set free.¹⁰⁶ Others were less fortunate. Some *pardos* who faced similar accusations were executed, some were banished, and others were set free only after enduring long, painful trials. *Pardos'* political denunciations, which they framed as righteous attempts on their part to impose republican law—in contrast to despotic elite cliques—were now described as factious attempts to promote race war. Trial after trial conveyed the message that public expression of racial grievances was dangerous and could lead to fatal personal and political consequences.¹⁰⁷

The criminal cases against *pardos* accused of sedition or racial enmity show the mechanisms through which local authorities inscribed racial grievances in a language of race war. The testimony of elites reveals not only their recalcitrance in accepting *pardos* with political authority—hardly a surprising reaction—but also their difficulties in expressing their antagonism. They could not openly accuse *pardos* of not knowing their place, or of not respecting natural hierarchies, because such notions were now declared despotic and antinational. Yet by inscribing *pardos'* denunciations of racial discrimination and defiance of elite authority in terms of racial enmity, the white elite managed to expunge *pardos'* actions from the sphere of legitimate politics.

Local elites referred to racial harmony as something that had already been achieved. They described their towns as places where racial peace and harmony already reigned, which made further change unnecessary and any reference to race pointless. This rhetoric left little, if any, room for racial grievances. The accusation against Justice Arcia provides a clear example of how this rhetoric was used. Justice Arcia's written dialogue about the persistence of racial and social discrimination in his town earned him accusations of seditious promotion of race war.¹⁰⁸ His complex conflicts with the local white elite were summarized thus: "he continues to lash out against the white class, with no consideration of the fact that we are all undifferentiated members of society. He has taken it upon himself to destroy the marriage that this tranquil town has enjoyed, promoting a criminal antipathy toward

¹⁰³ AHNC, República, Ministerio de Interior, t. 1, fol. 102.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 353.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, fols. 351–353.

¹⁰⁷ For a detailed analysis of criminal cases against *pardos* in Cartagena during the first decade of independence, see Lasso, "Race and Republicanism in the Age of Revolution."

¹⁰⁸ AHNC, República-Archivos Criminales, t. 96, fols. 244–322.

whites.”¹⁰⁹ Since harmony and equality were already present, Arcia’s racial complaints had to be a manifestation of his aversion to whites.

Once declared unnecessary, racial grievances became dangerous attempts to upset the public order. Thus, the white elite attributed any expression of racial conflict to the negative influence of disruptive figures who were trying to disturb the unity, peace, and tranquility of their towns. By associating racial grievances with race war, local authorities inscribed them within a general discourse of revolt and sedition. Let us return to the “honest *pardo*.” He was accused and convicted for his “alarming and threatening expressions against the government,” and for “attempting to provoke a popular commotion with his pamphlet.” He was also accused of spreading “seditious ideas” against the government—ideas capable of “inciting rebellion or at least disturbing public order.” The prosecutor claimed that since the publication of his pamphlet, the city had been “in constant alarm, fearing an insurrection at any moment.”¹¹⁰

In this way, the elite inverted notions of victimization. *Pardos* ceased to be victims of discrimination and became agents of racial hatred, while the elite ceased to be upholders of racial hierarchies and became the victims of racial hate. Moreover, there was no room for the notion of racial grievances within an elite discourse that declared equality to already have been achieved. The discourse of the authorities allowed no overlap between harmony and war; racial grievances had to fit into one category or the other. Through their association with race war and sedition, open debates about race and racial identification became marked as unpatriotic and antinational, and thus were excluded from legitimate public discourse. In short, not only was explicit racial talk criminalized by local elites, it was transformed into a seditious attempt to disturb public order and harmony.¹¹¹

The nationalist discourse of racial harmony was further consolidated by the ways in which local actors—*pardos* and the elite—related to the central state. Neither local authorities nor *pardos* could take the support of the state for granted. Not all *pardos* were found guilty by the central authorities. In some cases, the central state not only declared *pardos* innocent, but accused the local elite instead.¹¹² In others, they rejected the gravity of *pardos*’ racial speech. In one instance, the secretary of interior not only dismissed the alleged severity of *pardos*’ racial speech as an inconsequential act of drunkenness, but also reminded Cartagena’s government that it was “important as well as just” to ensure that the fair administration of justice eliminated any residue of old racial resentments between sections of the population.¹¹³

Success in obtaining a favorable decision from the central authorities depended in large part on the actors’ ability to frame their position according to legitimate republican principles. It was particularly important for them to express their support

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, t. 61, fols. 1143–1209.

¹¹⁰ AHNC, República, Ministerio de Interior, t. 1, fol. 102.

¹¹¹ This process was not unique to early-nineteenth-century Colombia. A century later, black Cubans who organized to combat the persistence of racism were also accused of promoting race war. Helg, *Our Rightful Share*. For a different approach to the relationship between crime and race in Cuba, see Alejandra Bronfman, “‘En Plena Libertad y Democracia’: *Negros Brujos* and the Social Question,” *HAHR* 82, no. 3 (2002): 549–587.

¹¹² See the cases of the aforementioned senator Remigio Márquez and of Buenaventura Pérez, AHNC, Anexo, Guerra y Marina, 106, fols. 445–477.

¹¹³ AHNC, República, Ministerio de Interior, t. 1, fol. 351.

for racial equality and public order. This tactic is clear in the response of the elites to *pardos*' denunciation of racial inequality. Local authorities had to convince the state that they were successfully promoting racial harmony and equality in their towns. The governor of Cartagena felt compelled to cite his efforts to lead people of all colors (*clases*) to "the most perfect union and social harmony" before denouncing Calixto Noguera—a politically active *pardo*—as an enemy of the whites. Local elites needed to make it clear that any racial conflicts that surfaced in their towns originated not in their discriminatory behavior but rather, to put it in the words of Cartagena's governor, in the "ignorant ambition" of "ungrateful men" who were not satisfied with the benefits the republic had bestowed on them.¹¹⁴ Thus, every time *pardos* raised the issue of racial discrimination, local elites had to repress and silence them while at the same time reiterating their public commitment to racial equality. The central state played a crucial role in consolidating the transformation of racial grievances into a taboo subject. It did so not only by further repressing *pardos*, but also by upholding the notion of racial harmony; with recalcitrant local elites forced to comply with a greater degree of racial equality than they may have been willing to accept, the fiction of harmony was maintained.

THE SPANISH AMERICAN WARS OF INDEPENDENCE raise some crucial questions about the impact of anticolonial struggles in the development of national racial imaginaries in the Americas. They suggest that the way in which national identity was shaped in opposition to imperialist enemies had a crucial impact on the future of race relations. A brief and tentative comparison between the United States and Colombia underlines this point. In both regions, patriot nationalism exalted the differences between tyrannical European metropolises and American republican freedom. Yet the place of race in the equation of freedom depended less on patriots' notions of freedom—which, after all, drew on the same Enlightenment tradition—than on where their colonial power stood on the issue of race. In other words, it depended on whether racial equality was perceived as a colonial imposition or as a patriot aspiration.¹¹⁵ In the United States, war propaganda made England the "champion" of blacks' rights. Patriots denounced England's support of blacks as yet another sign of that country's tyrannical attitudes toward Americans and its evil intentions of degrading them to equality with blacks.¹¹⁶ Their propaganda proclaimed that under the British, "the Negroes shall be free, and the Liberty Boys slaves."¹¹⁷ English propaganda echoed these feelings by highlighting the hypocrisy of patriots who proclaimed freedom while maintaining slavery and applauding Britain, "where Liberty reigns—where Negro no beaten or loaded with chains."¹¹⁸ As John Sweet points out, one of the "colonists' worst nightmares was the prospect of being degraded to equality with

¹¹⁴ AHNC, República, Secretaría de Guerra y Marina, t. 14, fol. 115.

¹¹⁵ I am inspired by Linda Colley's notion that "men and women decide who they are by reference to who and what they are not." Colley, *Britons*, 6. Her idea that national identity is shaped in opposition to national enemies is crucial for understanding the impact of anticolonial wars in the development of national racial identities.

¹¹⁶ I am summarizing Sweet, *Body Politics*, 191.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 189.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

blacks.”¹¹⁹ These sentiments were strikingly similar to those of Colombian and Venezuelan whites in the 1790s who denounced Spanish support of black militias as a clear sign of their disregard for the welfare of Spanish American subjects. Yet the Spanish American wars of independence inverted these notions. Patriot propaganda now harshly denounced Spanish “autocratic” opposition to blacks’ representation rights, inviting blacks and whites to “unite and give Europe an example of fraternity.”¹²⁰

The divergent associations between patriot nationalism and race that developed during the wars would have an enormous influence on the construction of modern imaginaries in both regions. Nationalism would determine whether racial equality would become a core element of the national ideology, as in Spanish America, or a precarious concept constantly subjected to challenge, as in the United States. In Colombia, the revolution had transformed racial equality from one of several political positions into an unchallengeable nationalist principle. That is why, in spite of the numerous civil wars and constitutional changes that shifted Colombia back and forth from federalism to centralism and from universal manhood suffrage to restricted suffrage, the principle of legal racial equality was never questioned. In the United States, racial equality was only one among a number of equally important and respectable positions, including the support of back-to-Africa programs. Few events represented the disconnect between nationalism and racial equality like the 4th of July celebrations of the 1820s and 1830s. Not only were free blacks harassed and expelled from the celebrations by rowdy mobs who claimed that the 4th of July “belongs exclusively to the white population,” but many American blacks chose a British holiday—August 1, West Indian Emancipation Day—as their holiday.¹²¹ Even at a symbolic level, the American Revolution failed to inaugurate a new era in race relations. That is why even today it is hard to find a nationalist icon in the U.S. who, like Simón Bolívar, can claim the allegiance of the entire nation. The struggle for racial equality in the United States was linked to bloody regional conflicts, not to a unified front against a common enemy. It would not be until another war—and another enemy—in the 1940s that the racial constructions developed during the Age of Revolution would begin to be successfully challenged.¹²²

Modern struggles to end formal and informal racial inequality in the United States and Spanish America would have to confront the conflictive associations between nationalism and racial equality that emerged during the Age of Revolution. In the United States, blacks would be excluded from the national imaginary and denied equal legal rights, yet they would form powerful and lasting political organizations that would effectively fight against formal and informal discrimination and prejudice. In Spanish America, blacks would enjoy legal equality and sometimes even

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹²⁰ “Proclama de José Francisco Bermúdez,” Cartagena, August 8, 1815, AHNC, Restrepo, rollo 5, fol. 179.

¹²¹ Leonard I. Sweet, “The Fourth of July and Black Americans in the Nineteenth Century: Northern Leadership Opinion within the Context of Black Experience,” *Journal of Negro History* 61, no. 3 (1976): 258–259; Shane White, “‘It Was a Proud Day’: African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741–1834,” *Journal of American History* 81 (1994): 38–41.

¹²² Lary May, “Making the American Consensus: The Narrative of Conversion and Subversion in World War II Films,” in Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsh, eds., *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness during World War II* (Chicago, 1996), 71–102.

become part of national imaginaries that acclaimed the mulatto as the embodiment of the nation. At the same time, however, they would face great difficulty in fighting prejudice and informal discrimination in a cultural environment that had made the denunciation of racism a taboo topic and black organizations a sign of unpatriotic divisiveness.

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