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The Language of Liberation: Slave Voices in the Wars of Independence

Peter Blanchard

In 1815, as warfare raged throughout Spanish South America and an increasing number of the inhabitants, regardless of race or class, began accepting the idea of independence, a Venezuelan black named Juan Izaguirre was telling slaves on the Valle de Onato estate that they were as free as anyone else. At the best of times, language and ideas such as these were considered inflammable and subversive. In the midst of the events of the early nineteenth century, they aroused even more concern, particularly in Venezuela where slaves had taken up arms some years earlier and were engaged in a struggle that threatened to develop into a race war, so that Izaguirre's prompt arrest must have produced widespread relief.¹ Yet, while actionable and disturbing, the words that he used should not have been unfamiliar to anyone, for Izaguirre was simply repeating what was then very much in vogue. His were the same words that the liberators were pronouncing throughout the continent. Where he differed, and what made his utterances more disquieting, was in their social thrust. They indicated that by 1815 the appeals for national independence and political freedom had taken a new direction and become closely intertwined with calls for personal liberty. They also revealed that the concept of freedom, in its various political and social guises, had become a subject of debate and discussion amongst all classes and races.

The origins of the language of the independence era can easily be traced. With the outbreak of the wars, the leaders of the Spanish American struggles turned to familiar themes and images to justify the reasons for their actions. Utilizing the concepts of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment as well as the

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1. "Sumaria información promovida contra Juan Izaguirre por propagar ideas de rebeldía entre los esclavos," Maracay, 19 Apr. 1815, Archivo General de la Nación, Caracas, Venezuela (hereafter cited as AGN-C), Archivo de Aragua, vol. 75, fol. 78.

American and French revolutions, they made frequent references to terms such as natural rights, popular sovereignty, separation of powers, and liberty.² As the struggles intensified, shifting from reform within the Spanish imperial structure to complete independence, the concepts of freedom and loyalty to the homeland or *patria* assumed increasing importance. So, too, did one particular analogy that began to appear with greater frequency in the discourse. Those fighting for freedom used the word “slavery” to describe their situation, accusing Spain of having “enslaved” the colonies. The accusations occasionally detailed, but more often simply implied, through the use of the term that Spanish Americans had experienced all the suffering that slavery denoted. Critics cast Spain as an abusive and exploitative master that had dominated the Americans and prevented them from fulfilling their potential. The latter’s fight thereby acquired a moral halo, as it sought to secure for the inhabitants of Spanish America not only freedom but also justice, equality, human rights, and everything else that their “enslavement” had prevented.

The liberators’ call for freedom with its associated slavery metaphor found favor at all levels of society, but it struck an especially resonant chord within that sector of the Spanish American population who in fact and by law were enslaved. Because of their status and situation the area’s slaves were naturally drawn to any language that referred to freedom. That attraction involved them in a two-pronged struggle as the wars for independence spread. They first accepted the word’s application to the political field and responded by committing their lives to national liberation. In the discourse of the time, they offered their “service to the cause of liberty.”³ Slaves and masters fighting for independence thus shared a common experience and a common language, although that sharing often masked an uneasy relationship, for many of the former had fled their owners to join the patriot forces. The relationship became further strained when the slaves took the language one step further and applied the concepts to their own circumstances to justify personal emancipation. In other words, they accepted the language of political liberation and then widened its terms of reference to the social field. It was hardly a development that the slave owners viewed with equanimity. However, the exigencies

2. John Lynch, *Latin American Revolutions, 1808–1826: Old and New World Origins* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 27–34; and Tulio Halperín-Donghi, *Politics, Economics and Society in Argentina in the Revolutionary Period*, trans. Richard Southern (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975), 111–24.

3. “Expediente seguido por Da Petronila Ferreyros,” 1822, Archivo General de la Nación, Lima, Peru, (hereafter cited as AGN–L), Expedientes judiciales, Causas civiles, cuad. 1, leg. 12.

of the independence wars created a situation that forced them to make concessions. Needing soldiers for their armies and trying to prevent slaves from supporting the royalist cause, revolutionary leaders in all parts of the continent granted slaves the freedom that they wanted. Further stimulating the slaves' redirection of the language to their personal circumstances was the fact that many of those same leaders voiced their objections to slavery and the slave trade, expressed their support for abolition, and issued antislavery legislation. It was an environment of unprecedented liberalism that raised obvious hopes among the slaves. But the offers of personal freedom were predicated upon one very important condition: slaves were expected not only to support the cause of liberty, they had to fight for it. The transference of the language of liberty to personal circumstances was made contingent upon slaves volunteering for military service. Many were prepared to do so, as their actions show. Consequently, much of what they said was uttered in the context of a military contribution, which, since warfare was the order of the day, should not be at all surprising. Slaves, therefore, fought; they explained their reason for fighting in the terms that the liberators were using; but they used the same language to call for their own freedom. And it was not just recruits who made these claims. Noncombatants, including female slaves, took advantage of the circumstances to make their voices heard as well. Together they struck a determined blow at the institution that was keeping them in chains. Their efforts did not succeed in ending slavery at this time, in large part because the wars in Spanish America were wars of national independence, not wars of abolition. Nevertheless, slavery throughout Spanish South America had been challenged as never before, and at wars' end it found itself in a seriously weakened state.

Any study of the use of language brings with it a variety of problems and pitfalls, as many have noted.⁴ This may be particularly true of the language of slaves. In the words of Stuart Schwartz, "recovering slave voices" is not "an easy task."⁵ That difficulty revolves around the fact that while the slaves' adoption and application of the language of the times can be found in various types of archival materials, including notarial records, civil and criminal court cases, military solicitations, and published interviews, we cannot be sure about the veracity of those accounts. Are we really hearing the voices of the slaves? How

4. On the extensive postmodern literature on interpreting language, see Patricia Seed, "Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse," *Latin American Research Review* 20, no. 3 (1991); and D. S. Parker, *The Idea of the Middle Class: White-Collar Workers and Peruvian Society, 1900-1950* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1998), 12-13.

5. Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1992), 21.

accurate are the words in the records? In some instances it was the owner of the slave or a representative of the master whose words are cited. Can we believe an owner who said that his slave had an “inclination to military service”?⁶ Was he honestly quoting his slave who had expressed a desire to serve, or was he trying to unload a troublesome individual who was worth whatever amount the state was prepared to pay for slave recruits? Can we accept the words of the slaves who also had reason to dissemble? Their testimony comes largely from court cases in which they were claiming their freedom or some other change in their status, and from military records in which they were seeking compensation or release from service. In both cases it was obviously in their best interest to make a favorable impression. In the circumstances they possibly chose words that they knew would have a positive impact on the individual who was determining their destinies. Are witnesses correct in their recollections of conversations? Have notaries and secretaries accurately conveyed the words of the respondents? Do the extracts selected by the historian from much broader testimony distort the witnesses’ words? Does the translation into English adequately reflect the words of the historical figures? Put simply, to what extent have the several intermediaries misinterpreted or altered the original words?⁷ Along the same lines, why is it that quotations of slave language present the slaves’ words as accented and grammatically incorrect, while the language of whites and other racial groups, that was probably equally accented and ungrammatical, is presented as correct? One of the few interviews that exist of a black veteran of the independence wars, an ex-slave from Buenos Aires who fought at the battle of Chacabuco in Chile, raises this question. According to the interviewer, who met him many years after the event, the soldier recalled shouting, “¡No querré azuca; pues toma azuca!”⁸ as he killed a Spanish soldier and then cut off his victim’s lip and mustache as a souvenir.⁹ What impression was the interviewer trying to convey to his readers of his subject?

6. “Contribución de fincas, comprobantes de pago,” Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires, Argentina (hereafter cited as AGN-BA), Contribución directa, 1813–1817, sala III-35-4-5.

7. For an interesting analysis of a document involving slaves in the late colonial period, see María Eugenia Chaves, *María Chiquinquirá Díaz: Una esclava del siglo XVIII: Acerca de las identidades de amo y esclavo en el puerto colonial de Guayaquil* (Guayaquil: Archivo Histórico del Guayas, 1998).

8. A loose translation in English: “Take your suga’ and shove it!”

9. The reason for this rather mysterious battle cry can be found in the attempt by General José de San Martín to arouse his black soldiers before his invasion of Chile in 1817. He apparently told them that any who were captured by the royalists should expect to be sent to work on the sugar plantations or resold as slaves for quantities of sugar. See

The numerous problems in extracting the slaves' language may explain why only a few have studied this aspect of their response to the independence struggles. One is Camilla Townsend who, in an article on slaves in late colonial Ecuador, has directly addressed the topic. She makes the point that the independence period produced unprecedented testimony by slaves. She notes that they "spoke with a confidence rare at other times" as they "drew a logical connection between the end of the colonial relationship with Spain and the end of their own position as slaves in relation to a master." The words were not new, but they assumed new significance and urgency in the context of the independence struggles. This verbal assertiveness accompanied a greater activism as they sought to secure their own liberation.¹⁰ Argentine historian Sylvia Mallo, in a more broadly focused article, has examined the discourse of the state, owners, and slaves in the Rio de la Plata region between 1780 and 1830. Here slaves struggled to obtain their freedom using the language of the times, but were opposed by the owners who wanted to maintain slavery and expressed their objections and their defense of their property rights as eloquently as the slaves. On the outbreak of the independence war, the state added its voice to the debate, indicating a willingness to grant freedom to the slaves, but only on condition that they volunteer for military service. Emilia Viotti da Costa has also made reference to the use of language of different racial groups at the time of independence in her study of imperial Brazil. She has shown how the different sectors of society employed the same words but for different purposes. Members of the elite along with blacks and mulattos employed the concept of freedom, but the latter adapted the concept in an attempt to establish equality with the whites. She notes the "contradictory" aims that existed in the use of this language as liberal whites supported independence but wanted to retain slavery and, therefore, were reticent to promote revolutionary ideas for fear of their social implications.¹¹ Similar fears existed in Spanish America and

Gerónimo Espejo, "El paso de los Andes: Crónica histórica de las operaciones del Ejército de los Andes para la restauración de Chile in 1817," in Argentina, Senado de la Nación, *Biblioteca de mayo, colección de obras y documentos para la historia Argentina: Guerra de la independencia*, 17 vols. (Buenos Aires: Imp. del Congreso de la Nación, 1963), 1:14038, 14105; and Núria Sales de Bohigas, *Sobre esclavos, reclutas y mercaderes de quintos* (Barcelona: Ed. Ariel, 1974), 76.

10. Camilla Townsend, "'Half 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): 107, 118.

11. Silvia C. Mallo, "La libertad en el discurso del estado, de amos y esclavos, 1780–1830," *Revista de Historia de América* 112 (1991); and Emilia Viotti da Costa, *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), 10–12.

a similar contradictory situation existed with regard to the language of liberation, but here the outbreak of warfare provided an opportunity for slaves to secure their freedom in a way denied the slave population of Brazil.

Lying behind the slaves' responses to the wars were the changes brought about by the Bourbon reforms of the late eighteenth century. Perhaps most important were the Crown's economic liberalization policies that included the slave trade. As a result, the slave population in the colonies grew substantially.¹² On the eve of the independence struggles slaves numbered around 30,000 in the Viceroyalty of Rio de la Plata, 78,000 in New Granada, over 64,500 in Venezuela, and 89,000 in the Viceroyalty of Peru (of whom perhaps 6,000 resided in Chile). Nowhere did they exceed more than ten percent of the total population, but they tended to be concentrated in certain regions, adding weight to their numbers.¹³ They may not have been as central to the development of Spanish South America as they were to Brazil, the Caribbean colonies, and the United States, nevertheless they were of considerable importance. Everywhere they played a recognized economic role as investments and workers. For example, they filled the traditional rural roles associated with the institution, laboring on Peruvian sugar plantations and vineyards, on cacao and sugar plantations in Venezuela, in Colombian gold mines, on tobacco and cacao farms on the Ecuadorian coast, and on livestock ranches in Argentina and Venezuela. They were equally if not more prominent in the urban sector of these regions, working as domestic servants and performing a variety of skilled and unskilled jobs for urban employers.¹⁴ Thus, although the slave

12. Cristina Ana Mazzeo, *El comercio libre en el Perú: Las estrategias de un comerciante criollo*, José Antonio de Lavalle y Cortés, *Conde de Premio Real, 1777-1815* (Lima: Pontificia Univ. Católica del Perú, 1994); Ildefonso Pereda Valdés, *El negro en el Uruguay: Pasado y presente* (Montevideo: n. p., 1965), 45, 46, 244-48; and Lyman L. Johnson, "Manumission in Colonial Buenos Aires, 1776-1810," *HAHR* 59, no. 2 (1979): 260 n. 4.

13. There is no unanimity with regard to the number of slaves. These are taken from John Lynch, *Argentine Dictator: Juan Manuel de Rosas, 1829-1852* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 119; Allan J. Kuethe, *Military Reform and Society in New Granada, 1773-1808* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1978), 29; John Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808-1826*, 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), 191; Christine Hünefeldt, *Paying the Price of Freedom: Family and Labor Among Lima's Slaves, 1800-1854*, trans. Alexandra Stern (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994), 9; Guillermo Feliú Cruz, *La abolición de la esclavitud en Chile: Estudio histórico y social*, 2d ed. (Santiago: Ed. Universitaria, 1973), 32, 33; and P. Michael McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas: Politics, Economy and Society, 1777-1811* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 9-11, 22. For alternative figures, see Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988), 334-35.

14. See Nicholas P. Cushner, *Lords of the Land: Sugar, Wine, and Jesuit Estates of*

trade was curtailed early in the nineteenth century in response to Crown directives and the disruptions of the Napoleonic wars, thousands of recent imports were left behind, constituting a vital sector of the population.

Numerically and economically important, slaves were also a potentially disruptive, even revolutionary, force in late colonial society. The recent African-born migrants were largely young men who remembered what it was like to be free.¹⁵ They had been shipped to colonies where unrest had followed the implementation of the Bourbons' various economic and administrative reforms and where Crown attempts to avoid possible slave unrest may have only exacerbated the problem. In 1784 it approved but never promulgated a new slave code that offered some protections for the slave population. Five years later when it finally issued a *cedula* that incorporated many of these reforms, opposition by officials and owners in the colonies prevented its implementation. Protests and some violence followed, as slaves believed that they had been denied an opportunity to improve their situation.¹⁶ Of much greater concern to the authorities were the events that began in 1791 in the neighboring French colony of St. Domingue. The outbreak of the slave rebellion that led eventually to the destruction of both slavery and French rule on the island established a precedent that terrified slave regimes throughout the Americas. A slave uprising in Coro, Venezuela, in 1795 and unrest elsewhere may not have equaled the magnitude of the St. Domingue insurrection, but they gave further warning of the racial powder keg on which the Spanish colonies rested and ensured continuing attention to the slave population.¹⁷

Coastal Peru, 1600–1767 (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1980); McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas*, 22–23, 46–51, 55–57; William Frederick Sharp, *Slavery on the Spanish Frontier: The Colombian Chocó, 1680–1810* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1976), esp. chap. 7; Chaves, *María Chiquinquirá Díaz*, 10; Marta B. Goldberg and Silvia C. Mallo, “La población africana en Buenos Aires y su campaña: Formas de vida y de subsistencia (1750–1850),” *Temas de Africa y Asia* 2 (1993): 36, 37, 39, 46.

15. On the revolutionary potential of slaves in America, see Peter M. Voelz, *Slave and Soldier: The Military Impact of Blacks in the Colonial Americas* (New York: Garland, 1993), 275, 277; and Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1979), 18–19.

16. Manuel Lucena Salmoral, *Sangre sobre piel negra: La esclavitud quiteña en el contexto del reformismo borbónico* (Quito: Ed. Abya-Yala, 1994), chaps. 1, 2, 6; McKinley, *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas*, 122, 125; David Patrick Geggus, “Slave Resistance in the Spanish Caribbean in the Mid-1790s,” in *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1997), 132–33, 136.

17. For a discussion of slave rebellions and conspiracies in the circum-Caribbean area

The Haitian revolution was the last in a series of late-eighteenth-century developments that spread ideas among and provided a language for Spanish America's slaves. Whether slaves actually honed their arguments in direct response to Enlightenment ideas, American and French revolutionary writings, and the Haitian example has been the subject of some debate. Since only a small percentage of slaves were literate, it is unlikely that many of them had read the relevant material. Yet they seem to have had some contact, for owners charged that revolutionary ideas were circulating and that slaves were responding to them. However, we should be somewhat leery of accepting those charges at face value, as owners had their own, selfish reasons for making them. For one thing, the charges deflected attention from their responsibility for late colonial slave unrest. Nevertheless, there was a very real fear of the spread of these ideas through the slave population and some evidence of their presence.¹⁸

In this environment of rebellious peoples and revolutionary language, one concern of the authorities was to keep the slave population firmly under control. Fear of slaves and slave agitation had existed since the arrival of the first black slaves in the colonies, with the result that various measures had been introduced during the colonial period to regulate them. A particular concern was to keep weapons out of their hands. To achieve this, legislation had been passed in the different colonies at different times prohibiting slaves from carrying arms or even tools.¹⁹ The frequent reissuance of the prohibition indi-

between 1789 and 1815, see David Patrick Geggus, "Slavery, War, and Revolution in the Greater Caribbean, 1789–1815," in Gaspar and Geggus, *A Turbulent Time*, esp. 46–49. There has been some debate over the source of this unrest: whether it should be traced to the presence of increased numbers of African versus American-born slaves, that is, to changes within the slaveholding societies, or to the spread of revolutionary ideas. Both can be seen to have been present in Spanish South America. For the debate, see Geggus, "Slave Resistance in the Spanish Caribbean," 131–32.

18. Among those who argue that the French and Haitian revolutions had an impact on Spanish American slaves are José Marcial Ramos Guédez, "La insurrección de los esclavos negros de Coro en 1795: Algunas ideas en torno a posibles influencias de la revolución francesa," *Revista Universitaria de Ciencias del Hombre . . . Universidad José María Vargas* 2, no. 2 (1989); Winthrop R. Wright, *Café con Leche: Race, Class, and National Image in Venezuela* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1990), 25–26; Carlos M. Rama, "The Passing of the Afro-Uruguayans from Caste Society into Class Society," in *Race and Class in Latin America*, ed. Magnus Mörner (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1970), 33–34; Paulo de Carvalho Neto, *El negro uruguayo, hasta la abolición* (Quito: Ed. Universitaria, 1965), 95. For a somewhat more critical view, see the collection of articles in Gaspar and Geggus, *A Turbulent Time*, esp. Geggus, "Slavery, War, and Revolution."

19. See Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524–1650* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1974), 154–56; and Carvalho-Neto, *El negro uruguayo*, 96.

cates both that it had little effect and that racial fears remained very much alive. Another indicator was the long-standing exclusion of slaves from the colonies' armies and militias. Slaves may have found themselves in arms at different places and on different occasions, but the instances were few and they were strictly controlled.²⁰ In contrast, from early in the colonial period free blacks and mulattos were extensively recruited because of demographic realities and military demands. Because of their black heritage their recruitment may have been viewed with some misgivings,²¹ yet more and more of them were appearing in both regular and militia units in the late eighteenth century following the Crown's wide-ranging military reforms.²² Slaves, on the other hand, were still excluded, as the colonies' rulers and elites remained adamantly opposed to arming this sector of the population.

Exceptional circumstances, however, could weaken even the most strongly held attitudes. Pragmatic realities could force officials and elites to make what were, in fact, radical and—to many—unpopular decisions. Such was the case in 1806 and 1807 when English forces invaded the Viceroyalty of Rio de la

20. For example, slaves were used as auxiliary labor battalions for the Cuban forces in the 1760s and in the artillery, serving in the ammunition and storage sections. In late-eighteenth-century Florida they also served in the artillery and as sailors and rowers to transport supplies. None of these duties involved bearing arms. See Herbert S. Klein, "The Colored Militia of Cuba: 1568–1868," *Caribbean Studies* 6, no. 2 (1966): 20; Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1999), 206–7. Jane Landers also writes that Spaniards "employed free and enslaved Africans in local self-defense, as plantation and town militias, as coastal sentinels, and even as sailors on locally organized patrol boats," but her references are to the specific case of Cuba. See Jane Landers, "Africans in the Spanish Colonies," *Historical Archaeology* 31, no. 1 (1997): 89. The situation in the Spanish Caribbean and the northern borderlands may have been different from Spanish South America.

21. The fact that the military was considered by some to be an institution reserved for the respected classes was a factor in this, as it was in the opposition to recruiting slaves. See Seth Meisel, "War, Economy, and Society in Post-Independence Córdoba, Argentina" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford Univ., 1998), 46–47.

22. Voelz, *Slave and Soldier*, 118–21. For studies of the military reforms that also cover black recruitment, see Kuethe, *Military Reform and Society*; Lyle N. McAlister, *The "Fuero Militar" in New Spain, 1764–1800* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1957); Christon I. Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico, 1760–1810* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1977); Ben Vinson, "Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia Univ., 1998); Allan J. Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753–1815: Crown, Military, and Society* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1986); Klein, "The Colored Militia of Cuba," 17–22; Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*, chap. 9; and Leon G. Campbell, *The Military and Society in Colonial Peru, 1750–1810* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1978).

Plata. In the face of this crisis the authorities in Buenos Aires were prepared to arm slaves and accept them into the military. Their decision proved to be a critical one, for the recruits helped to defeat the invaders. As a reward and in accordance with accepted practices, a number of them were given their freedom.²³ With the outbreak of the independence wars after 1810 an even more exceptional situation arose. The spread of fighting created an unprecedented demand for soldiers, once again challenging long-held social barriers and deeply felt racial fears. From Venezuela in the north to the Rio de la Plata in the south recruiters turned to slaves, offering them their freedom in return for military service. Thousands responded, with the result that the political struggle acquired a social dimension that few, if any, of the revolutionary leaders had anticipated. Moreover, that military service created the framework for the slaves' verbal initiative.

Why were so many slaves willing to consider military service in view of its obvious dangers? The principal reason was that it offered something that slaves could otherwise secure only with the greatest difficulty: their personal freedom. Freedom was the ultimate goal for most slaves.²⁴ In the words of Lorenzo Villanueva, a bricklayer from Buenos Aires, it was "the most sacred right." Another Buenos Aires slave, Joaquina Estrada, described it as *amada* in explaining to a court in 1813 why she and her husband had fled their owner.²⁵ It was sacred, it was beloved, because slaves did not have it and because few

23. George Reid Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800-1900* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 94-95. For the tradition of freeing slaves who provided military service, see Sales, *Sobre esclavos*, 132-34. Examples can be found from as early as the conquest period.

24. It should be noted that not every slave was so inclined. Circumstances could cause some slaves to choose to remain as slaves or even return to slavery. When one Argentine slave was offered the option of remaining a freeman in the army or returning to his owner because of irregularities in his recruitment, he chose the latter. He may have been responding to the realities of military life, but the court testimony suggests that he was influenced by the fact that his family was still in his former owner's house and unlikely to be freed. Another recruited slave asked to be returned to his owner after being found unfit for military service because he had no other way to survive. See "Expediente promovido por Doña Juana Ines Pérez, sobre la devolución de 4 esclavos," 1815, AGN-BA, Administrativos, leg. 28, expediente (hereafter cited as exp.) 970, sala IX-23-8-2; and Solicitudes militares, 1815, sala X-8-7-5.

25. "Expediente formado por el negro Francisco, esclavo de Dn. José Alberto Calsena y Echevarria: reclamando su libertad," 1813, AGN-BA, Administrativos, leg. 29, exp. 984; and "Lorenzo Villanueva, pardo esclavo de Dn. Juan Antonio de Sta. Coloma, solicitando que se le otorgue papel de venta," 1812, AGN-BA, Administrativos, leg. 29, exp. 997, sala IX-23-8-3; and Mallo, "La libertad en el discurso," 136-37.

ways existed to obtain it. Even in the liberal atmosphere of the independence period, complete and total abolition was out of the question because of the opposition of influential slaveholders as well as the commitment of the new leaders to protecting property rights. Alternative routes to freedom were scarce. Over the years owners had emancipated small numbers of slaves, but the grants were often conditional upon continued service, and the primary beneficiaries were female slaves. More slaves managed to secure their freedom through self-purchase, but the number was still minute as few managed to accumulate the necessary funds. In 1810 only a fraction over one percent of slaves in Buenos Aires received their freedom via this route.²⁶ Thus, in a situation where the doorways were few, any offers of freedom or even references to the word, regardless of context, were certain to attract slave attention.²⁷

Initially, however, as fighting began, blacks, like other groups in the colonies, remained staunchly royalist. Past acts and initiatives on their behalf and an innate loyalty to the Crown played a bigger role in the slaves' decision-making than vague offers by small groups of unknown agitators. It had been the Crown that had ordered their incorporation into militia units, and it had been the Crown that had offered freedom to those slaves in Buenos Aires who had contributed to the defense of the city. Similar gestures by the Cortes of Cádiz, that claimed after 1810 to rule in the name of the captive King Ferdinand, maintained slave support. It may have refused to accept coloreds as citizens, but it recognized free blacks as "Spaniards," and individual members of the Cortes recommended abolition of the slave trade and even an end to slavery.²⁸ While these gestures now seem minimal and contradictory, compared to

26. Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines*, 42–44, 47–48; Johnson, "Manumission in Colonial Buenos Aires," 258–79; and Carvalho-Neto, *El negro uruguayo*, 94.

27. How slaves at this time viewed freedom is not clear. The suddenness of the offer gave little opportunity for planning or comment. Moreover, since the offer was contingent upon military service, their first consideration would have been life as soldiers. That many wanted to enjoy the unexpected offer is clear from the fact that large numbers tried various means to escape military service and its obvious dangers once they were out of the hands of their owners and enrolled. See Peter Blanchard, "La agresividad de los esclavos en Venezuela y Argentina durante las guerras de independencia," in *Violencia social y conflicto civil: América Latina siglo XVIII–XIX*, Cuadernos de Historia Latinoamericana, no. 6, ed. Anthony McFarlane and Marianne Wiesebron (Ridderkerk: AHILA, 1998), 111–12.

28. Voelz, *Slave and Soldier*, 396; Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines*, 43; Jaime E. Rodríguez O., *The Independence of Spanish America* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 86, 87, 117; and "Razones de las cantidades que ha suplido al cabildo de los fondos públicos por el valor de 25 esclavos," AGN-BA, Hacienda, leg. 141, exp. 3623, sala IX-34-8-3. For a discussion of black loyalty despite discrimination against and restrictions on them, see Carvalho-Neto, *El negro uruguayo*, 99–100.

the reactionary views and actions of many revolutionaries, particularly those in Venezuela who displayed little sympathy for the slave population, they gave the appearance of some concern for black interests that proved attractive. Moreover, the weakness and early failures of the liberators' cause in much of the continent determined which side the slaves were going to support.

Consequently, free blacks and slaves joined the royalist forces in large numbers. Among them was José Francisco Texeira, a free mulatto from Montevideo who was killed at the battle of Las Piedras in May 1811. His widow, a free *parda* named María Isidora Durán, in seeking compensation for her loss, stated that José had volunteered for the infantry in order to defend the "sacred rights of our monarch." He had served until his "glorious death at the hands of the insurgents."²⁹ Slaves were prompted by the same feelings as well as by the opportunity to obtain their personal freedom. In 1811 the royalist army in Montevideo turned to slaves in order to meet its desperate military needs, and officials began offering freedom in return for military service.³⁰ In Venezuela, slaves took advantage of the political chaos to rebel, threatening a Haitian-style race war. Simultaneously, many joined the royalist forces and helped to crush both the first and second republics.³¹ Everywhere they expressed their love of king and homeland. While a good part of the reported words may be the fabrication of royalist secretaries and notaries, the fact that slaves were using the opportunity to make demands upon the state suggests that we are hearing at least some of what they said. Domingo Ordoy, an African-born *moreno* who had been a slave in Montevideo, claimed his freedom in Peru in 1813 on the grounds that he had fought the English at Buenos Aires and "the other masters of said city had given freedom to their slaves for defending the patria." Also claiming his freedom was Juan Nepomuceno, a Venezuelan slave, who stated that he had fought in the royalist army "with the greatest faithfulness and adhesion to the just cause of Spain" against the "factions." Another Venezuelan slave, Ramón Piñero, joined the royalist forces under the command of the brutal but effective leader of the *llaneros*, Tomás Boves. With "arms in hand" he had "served with much love and faithfulness my King." Now he wanted his freedom.³²

29. AGN-BA, Solicitudes militares, 1810-1813, sala X-35-7-6.

30. José Apolinario Saucó, 1815, AGN-BA, Solicitudes militares, sala X-8-7-6.

31. Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions*, 198-99, 204-07.

32. "Autos seguidos por Domingo Ordois contra D. José Aniceto de Arróspide sobre su libertad," 1813, AGN-L, Cabildo, Causas civiles, leg. 26, cuad. 421; "D. Manuel García, Capitan de la Compañía de Cazadores del Regimiento de Sagunto pretendiendo la libertad del esclavo Juan Nepomuceno de los bienes de Conde de Tovar," Archivo de la

As the revolutionaries took up arms and cut the ties that had long bound mother country and colonies, they, too, began appealing to the black population. To justify the separation they spoke of the need for self-government, freedom, and even independence, some of which struck a resonant chord among slaves. An aspect of the revolutionaries' verbal offensive was to transform the four-hundred-year relationship between Spain and America from one that glorified the linkages and Spain's contribution to one of antagonism and hatred. Central to that transformation was the equating of Spanish colonialism with enslavement. It was an obvious analogy in view of the close interrelationship that had long been drawn between the concepts of freedom and slavery, that the one was the antithesis of the other.³³ Since the independence leaders were seeking freedom, what had gone before obviously must have been a period of "enslavement," and this became a common metaphor in the language of the time. In 1813 a commentator in Buenos Aires wrote:

Servitude is not the greatest evil: a slave can very easily be happy in the hope that it will end. He, who lacks [hope] because he is unaware of its end, is even more worthy of compassion. He is a miserable being incapable of achieving his destiny or of improving himself; nothing can tie him to his fellow man except hatred or fear. He knows no other bond than hardship, no other obligation than submission to the strongest. He loves vice, because he does not need virtue. And in the end he is always weak, always prostrated in the dust and in misery.³⁴

This was not a call for abolition. It was a description of those living in Buenos Aires under Spanish rule. In similar fashion the military leaders of the struggles resorted to this analogy, initially targeting corrupt officials as the source of enslavement. Transferring the target to Spain occurred later as independence

Academia Nacional de la Historia, Caracas, Venezuela (hereafter cited as AANH-C), *Civiles-Escavos*, vol. 1815-GHI, exp. 2; and "Libertad de Ramón Piñero, esclavo del Dr. D. Juan de Roxas," vol. 1815-OP, exp. 5.

33. See Orlando Patterson, *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*, vol. 1 of *Freedom* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), xiii-xvi. This seems a rather limited definition of "freedom," which, nevertheless, does not negate the relationship, particularly in this situation where individuals were seeking to free their countries and to justify that freedom. For an alternative concept of freedom, see Anthony McFarlane, *Colombia before Independence: Economy, Society, and Politics under Bourbon Rule* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), 248.

34. *Gazeta Ministerial del Gobierno de Buenos Ayres*, no. 71, 19 Sept. 1813, 448.

became the revolutionaries' principal goal. José Gervasio Artigas used the analogy frequently in describing the situation in his homeland of the Banda Oriental. In 1811 he wrote of troops breaking "the chains of their slavery," and in a letter to the viceroy of Rio de la Plata in which he claimed to be defending the dominions of "our Sovereign" Ferdinand VII, he noted, "All the inhabitants of this vast countryside have awakened from the lethargy in which they found themselves, and thrown off the heavy yoke of shameful slavery."³⁵ Manuel Piar, the Venezuelan mulatto general, proclaimed to the inhabitants of Margarita Island in 1814 that to him "death was more worthy than slavery," while the Argentine José de San Martín declared from Santiago before his invasion of Peru that he was not "a conquistador who was trying to organize a new slavery."³⁶ The city council of Santiago, on the embarkation of the expedition to Peru in June 1820, made reference to "the tyrants who believe they can enslave with impunity the sons of freedom."³⁷ And the Liberator, Simón Bolívar, before the battle of Junín in 1824, engaged in his customary hyperbole in exhorting his troops: "You are going to complete the greatest task that heaven has been able to entrust to man," he said, "that of saving the entire world from slavery."³⁸

This language was echoed among all sectors of society. Antonio Pérez, a soldier from Montevideo who served the patriot cause in both the navy and the infantry, asserted his desire "to resign formally from vassalage to the king of Spain and to be employed in service and in defense of freedom."³⁹ Another soldier, Antonio Morales, sounded like Manuel Piar in explaining his reason for fighting: "It was better to die free than to live a slave."⁴⁰ Even slaveholders

35. Artigas to Junta, 27 Apr. 1811, AGN-BA, Representantes de la Junta, Castelli y Belgrano, Ejército del Norte y Banda Oriental, sala X-3-2-4; Artigas to Elío, 21 May 1811, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain (hereafter cited as AGI), Buenos Aires 98; and Copias de los documentos referente al Ejército del Norte, 1811, AGN-BA, Banda Oriental, sala X-42-7-1.

36. "Proclama a los habitantes de la Isla Margarita," 31 Aug. 1814, AGI, Caracas 825; and *Gaceta Extraordinaria del Gobierno de Lima*, 11 Mar. 1819, 142.

37. Chile, *Boletín de las leyes i decretos del gobierno, 1819-1820* (Santiago: Imp. Nacional, 1900), 273.

38. Quoted in Simón B. O'Leary, *Bolívar en el Perú* (Caracas: Archivo General de la Nación, 1971), 45. For an earlier example of Bolívar's use of the metaphor, see his 1815 Jamaica letter reprinted in *Selected Writings of Bolívar*, ed. Vicente Lecuna and Harold A. Bierck Jr., trans. Lewis Bertrand, 2 vols. (New York: Colonial Press, 1951), 1:105, 106, 110.

39. AGN-BA, Solicitudes militares, 1818, sala X-10-9-5.

40. Antonio Morales asking for release from the army, May 1812, AGN-BA, Guerra, Ejército Auxiliar del Perú, sala X-3-10-4.

used the language, speaking of “breaking the chains of the oppressors” as they donated their slaves to achieve that goal.⁴¹ So, too, did the royalists, indicating how powerful, emotive, and universal the enslavement image had become. The viceroy of Peru responded to the imminent invasion from Chile with the words: “To be able to draw you into the abyss of oppression and slavery, [the revolutionaries] try to delude you with the seductive ideas of *liberty* and *independence*.”⁴² Following Bolívar’s assumption of command of the republican troops in Peru, a royalist newspaper described him as “the cruel Bolívar . . . the odious monster of Venezuela” who was planning “to carry out his senseless project to enslave Peru” under Colombia’s dominion.⁴³ But it was the liberators who utilized the term most frequently, applying it so relentlessly that royalists were compelled to protest. A refugee in Kingston, Jamaica, commenting on the destructiveness of the wars in 1815, wrote that those responsible seemed prepared “to destroy in a moment the order that they have seen established in the 300 years that they call slavery and peace of the tomb.”⁴⁴

As they were verbally condemning Spain, the revolutionaries were also making direct appeals for the slaves’ support, in part to lure them away from the royalists, in part because they were seen as a group whose backing could prove militarily important. The appeal was made first through legislation that reflected the liberal tenor of both the times and the new rulers and was designed to demonstrate an appreciation of slave concerns. All of the new self-governing states passed laws ending the African slave trade and declaring children born from a certain date to be free, the so-called free womb laws. Legislation of this sort took effect in Santiago in October 1811, in Buenos Aires in April 1812 and January 1813, and in Lima in August and November 1821 after San Martín’s declaration of independence.⁴⁵ The Argentine supreme decree of 9 April 1812, that ended the slave trade made reference to “the rights of afflicted humanity . . . and to the consequences of the liberal principles that the illustrious peoples of the United Provinces of Rio de la Plata have proclaimed and defend with valor and energy.”⁴⁶ Other legislation, such as a May

41. *Gazeta Ministerial de Buenos Ayres*, no. 61, 30 June 1813, 135.

42. Italics in the original. See *Gaceta del Gobierno de Lima*, no. 22, 31 Apr. 1819, 210.

43. *El Triunfo del Callao* (Lima), 16 June 1824; and Timothy E. Anna, *The Fall of the Royal Government in Peru* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1979), 226.

44. Copy of a letter of José González Llorense, 14 Apr. 1815, AGI, Santa Fé 747.

45. Feliú Cruz, *La abolición*, 38–40; Argentina, *Registro oficial de la República Argentina que comprende los documentos espeditos desde 1810 hasta 1872*, 2 vols. (Buenos Aires: La República, 1879), 1:194; and Peter Blanchard, *Slavery and Abolition in Early Republican Peru* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1992), 7.

46. Argentina, *Registro oficial de la República Argentina*, 1:168.

1812 Buenos Aires law that provided money to free four slaves “to celebrate our civil liberty,”⁴⁷ established a link between the political liberation that was occurring and the end of slavery, while creating new opportunities for slaves to secure their freedom.⁴⁸ This language that tied the area’s liberation with the ending of slavery was reiterated by many of the independence figures over the following years. It culminated in Bolívar’s oft-cited comment: “It seems to me madness that a revolution for freedom expects to maintain slavery.”⁴⁹ While concern about property rights and fear of immediate and sudden emancipation prevented complete abolition, the legislation and proclamations gave clear evidence that the liberators were conscious of the slaves’ situation and were keen to attract them.⁵⁰

Appeals for slave support were accompanied by efforts to recruit them into the patriot armies. In Venezuela, during the first republic (1811–12), Francisco Miranda tried to win over the slave population by offering freedom in return for ten years of military service. His offer, however, alienated creole slaveholders and failed to attract many slaves. It was not until 1816 that Simón Bolívar turned aggressively to recruiting slaves as he came to realize that he could not defeat the royalist forces in Venezuela without either their support or, at least, their neutralization. The small number of recruits prompted frequent complaints; nevertheless, he continued to turn to them until the final battles and he became one of the strongest exponents of abolition.⁵¹ Far more effective in the recruitment of slaves were the revolutionaries in the Rio de la Plata region. War broke out in the area almost immediately following the May 1810 revolution in Buenos Aires as the new leaders sought to establish their authority over the entirety of the viceroyalty, arousing opposition from local and regional elites as well as royalist forces. The extent of the fighting and many reversals created a continuing need for soldiers. Yet, the emergence of a formal recruitment program was almost accidental, and more reactive than

47. *Suplemento a la Gaceta Ministerial* (Buenos Aires), 15 May 1812.

48. See Argentina, *Registro oficial de la República Argentina*, 1:194, 213.

49. Bolívar to Santander, 5 May 1820, in *Cartas Santander–Bolívar 1820*, 6 vols. (Bogotá: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, 1988), 2:137. For examples of comments similar to Bolívar’s, see “El Señor Procurador General por el esclavo Joaquín Vivas, solicitando se le declare libre, por haber servido en el ejército de la república,” AANH–C, *Civiles-Esclavos*, vol. 1830–LPV, exp. 4.

50. *Suplemento a la Gaceta Ministerial*, 29 May 1812.

51. John V. Lombardi, *The Decline and Abolition of Negro Slavery in Venezuela, 1820–1854* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing, 1971), 37–42; Lynch, *The Spanish American Revolutions*, 213; and *Correo del Orinoco* (Angostura), no. 116, 13 Oct. 1821.

innovative. To counter the royalist recruitment of slaves in Montevideo, José Artigas turned to the same sector of the population as he put together his first army. Simultaneously, José Rondeau, the commander of an Argentine army that had invaded the Banda Oriental, offered freedom to local slaves who joined his forces.⁵² The offer proved attractive, with numerous slaves fleeing their owners and joining the patriot cause. Effective in the Banda Oriental, it was soon offered to those on the opposite side of the river, as Argentine officials seemed to recognize that recruiting slaves had the benefit of not only supplementing the army, but also avoiding potential slave hostility. By making personal freedom a very real possibility, they might avoid the racial unrest that was devastating Venezuela. Strict controls were introduced to try to prevent an anarchic flight from owners and to keep the latter loyal. In May 1813, the government issued its first recruitment decree to create a regiment of slaves, “freeing from servitude a portion of those condemned to it as a consequence of ancient laws,” and raising them now “to the dignity of free men.” It directed that a certain number of slaves be taken from slaveholders who would be compensated, while the recruits would have to serve for five years. Over the following years further recruiting laws added to the numbers of those taken.⁵³ About 2000 slaves from the province of Buenos Aires were secured via this route, with additional recruits from neighboring provinces.⁵⁴ Other slaves took advantage of the legislation to flee their owners and join the army with its now significant black presence and to claim their freedom on the basis of their military service. Together they made up a large proportion of San Martín’s army that crossed the Andes to free Chile in 1817. More were added from the local slave populations when his liberating expedition advanced northward into Peru three years later.⁵⁵

While rejecting Spain and turning to the slave population to assist in destroying the colonial system, the liberators offered in its place a new concrete reality for American loyalty. This was the nation-state, the patria. They sought to transfer popular loyalty from the king and in his place create an alternative entity for which to fight and die. Royalists, too, expressed their love of patria, but the concept had greater significance for the separatists as they set

52. Rondeau to Junta, 13 May 1811, AGN-BA, Representantes de la Junta, Castelli y Belgrano, Ejército del Norte y Banda Oriental, sala X-3-2-4; and Pereda Valdés, *El negro en el Uruguay*, 107-8.

53. AGN-BA, Guerra, Rescate de esclavos, 1813-1817, sala X-43-6-7; and Argentina, *Registro oficial de la República Argentina*, 1:221, 249-50.

54. Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines*, 48.

55. Blanchard, *Slavery and Abolition*, 11.

about establishing independent nations and winning support for their endeavor. The frequent references to the patria were almost a paean of praise, an attempt to create a new icon to replace the Spanish king. The exhortations struck a responsive chord among those at the base of the social ladder, even if the concept of patria remained something of mystery to them.⁵⁶ Antonio Fernández, a volunteer in the Sixth Regiment of Pardos and Morenos of Buenos Aires, stated that he had joined “in defense of the just and sacred cause of our beloved patria.” He served for three years in the Banda Oriental and Paraguay until wounded at the battle of Cerrito in November 1813.⁵⁷ Slaves, too, adopted the term and repeated it as they joined the patriot armies, establishing a link with the other soldiers and indicating that they wanted to serve. For example, Mateo, the slave of a lieutenant colonel in the Buenos Aires army, expressed the “strongest desires to follow a career in the military.”⁵⁸ Lucas Lezica of Montevideo ran away to the army of Rondeau in December 1813. He presented its commander with a rifle that he had taken from the enemy and stated that he was “desirous of following a military career.” In particular, he “fancied” serving in the black Sixth Regiment.⁵⁹ Many said that their reason for joining was their love of the patria. According to Francisco de Eyzaga of Buenos Aires, his slave Antonio felt “compelled to serve in the ranks of the patria,” a compulsion Eyzaga was not prepared to deny.⁶⁰ Antonio Castro, the slave of a Spaniard, expressed his “living desire” to “sacrifice himself for the just cause of his patria,” as he offered himself to the patriot army.⁶¹

Love of country may not have been the true reason for serving in every case. Prior to his request to join the army, Antonio Castro had indicated to his owner that he wanted to marry, prompting his owner to threaten to sell him. Was enlistment with its offer of personal freedom the one sure way of consummating his love? It was a desperate choice, but understandable in view of the lack of options. Perhaps all of these men had no real desire to serve, and their claims of patriotism may be suspect, but the repetition of the same phrases indicate if not full support for the cause, at least an awareness of the issues and a realization that mouthing these words was a means of winning

56. The concept of nationhood was very weak in the new states, as Anthony McFarlane shows in “Identity, Enlightenment and Political Dissent in Late Colonial Spanish America,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series 7 (1998).

57. AGN-BA, Solicitudes militares, 1820, sala X-35-8-3.

58. AGN-BA, Solicitudes civiles y militares, 1816, sala X-9-2-4.

59. AGN-BA, Solicitudes militares, 1817, sala X-9-7-10.

60. AGN-BA, Guerra, Rescate de esclavos, 1813-1817, sala X-43-6-7.

61. AGN-BA, Solicitudes militares, 1815, sala X-8-7-4.

favor amongst the ruling elements. So slaves adopted the language of the revolutionaries, suggesting by doing so that their struggle was the same struggle. Gregorio Layoso, a Peruvian slave, had been given by his owner to the Spanish forces. When they were defeated by the independence forces, he had fled, “as lover of my patria” and enlisted in the patriot forces.⁶² Was his love genuine? Or was he cannily trying to establish a tie with the new rulers as he sought to secure his freedom from his old owner who had reclaimed him? Another slave who served on both sides was José Apolinario Sauco. The slave of a Spaniard, he had been living in Montevideo at the time of the siege and had been recruited into a royalist Battalion of Morenos with the promise of freedom. However, with the suspension of hostilities the battalion had been disbanded and he had been returned to his owner. He asked the new authorities that he be permitted to serve in the Buenos Aires forces, “for he found it more appealing (*gustoso*) to serve the patria than the masters who previously had given him his freedom.”⁶³

Rejection of the colonial system and acceptance of the liberators’ cause indicated that the slaves had growing confidence that the latter would, in fact, succeed, something that was not certain in the early years of the wars. They also saw in it an opportunity to obtain their personal freedom and even a chance to strike back at an owner, especially if that person was a Spaniard. Condemning a Spaniard for crimes against the new state was not only a sign of patriotism, it could be a route to freedom. Ignacio de los Santos and his wife Joaquina fled their Spanish owner in Potosí in Upper Peru in 1811. Making their way to Jujuy and eventually to Buenos Aires, Ignacio joined the army, rising to the rank of sergeant, while Joaquina served in the military hospital. They made their case for freedom by criticizing their former owner as a traitor to the cause of the patriots, as “a subject opposed by disposition and opinion to the system of the country.”⁶⁴ Another Potosí slave, Juana de la Patria, in 1813 denounced Manuela Cabrera as “a true lover of the present system,” who had conspired against the patriot army by sending reports of it in letters to her royalist lover in Oruro. For her patriotism, General Manuel Belgrano ordered that she be freed.⁶⁵ The situation proved irresistible to others. That same year,

62. Case of Gregorio Layosa, Sept. 1827, Archivo Arzobispal, Lima, Peru (hereafter cited as AA-L), Causas de negros, 1827, leg. 36, exp. 35.

63. AGN-BA, Solicitudes militares, 1815, sala X-8-7-6.

64. AGN-BA, Solicitudes militares, 1817, sala X-10-1-1.

65. Juana was still seeking her freedom in 1819. See “Expediente promovido por Juana de la Patria, emigrada de Potosí, sobre su libertad,” 1817, AGN-BA, Administrativos, leg. 32, exp. 1113, sala IX-23-8-6.

Domingo, a Buenos Aires slave, accused his owner, Antonio Apirón, a Spaniard, of having spoken “with intolerance of the sons of the country.” Apirón was arrested, but Domingo’s charges were challenged at the subsequent trial. Witnesses claimed that the accusations stemmed from the fact that Domingo had recently been punished. Apirón was ordered freed, but his wife was not prepared to trust Domingo further and sought to sell him.⁶⁶

Accepting and fighting for the liberators’ cause thus became a route to personal freedom and the two became intertwined in the discourse of the day. Slaves certainly made the link. In Santiago, after the passage of anti-slave-trade legislation in 1811 and the emancipation of some slaves by their owners, three hundred slaves armed with knives marched on the government whose actions they supported. “[T]hey made a representation asking for their freedom and offering in return their persons and lives to defend the system of the patria.”⁶⁷ Alejandro Campusano, an Ecuadorian slave was far more lyrical in making the same point. He recalled that “the sweet voice of the patria came to my ears, and desiring to be one of its soldiers as much to shake off the yoke of general oppression as to free me from the slavery in which I found myself, I ran swiftly to present myself to the liberating troops of Quito . . . under the command of Señor General Sucre.”⁶⁸ The same joy at achieving personal freedom is evident in the words of Francisco Estrada, a slave from the Banda Oriental. In response to Rondeau’s offer of freedom in 1811, he ignored his owner’s orders and with his wife sought the opportune time “to place ourselves under the flags of freedom.” He explained, “We chose then the generous system of the patria; we sang the hymns of freedom; and uniting our desires and our hearts with the holy sentiments of the just system of liberty, we once and for all renounced indignantly that hard, miserable, and disorganized government that degraded men and did not permit those who are called slaves to claim the rights of humanity.”⁶⁹ What he meant by “flags” is not entirely clear. He may have been referring to the regimental flags that played a vital role in maneuvering troops

66. “Domingo-negro esclavo con causa contra Antonio Apirón,” 1818, AGN-BA, Administrativos, leg. 29, exp. 986, sala IX-23-8-3.

67. Quoted in Feliú Cruz, *La abolición*, 48.

68. “El Señor Procurador Municipal en defensa de Alexandro Campusano, esclavo, sobre se le declare exento del servicio de esclavitud,” 1826, Archivo Histórico del Guayas, Guayaquil, Ecuador (hereafter cited as AHG-G), no. 5996. Thanks to Camilla Townsend for this reference.

69. “Expediente formado por el negro Francisco, esclavo de Dn. José Alberto Calsena y Echeverría: reclamando su libertad,” 1813, AGN-BA, Administrativos, leg. 29, exp. 984, sala IX-23-8-3.

on the field of battle. In this case those were the flags of the invading Buenos Aires army that had emblazoned on them the French Jacobin cap of liberty, a symbol of particular appeal to slaves. Or he may have been expressing himself more metaphorically, using the word to represent both the freedom of his homeland as well as his personal freedom that was being offered in exchange for his military contribution.

Granting freedom for military service discriminated against one obvious sector of the slave population, yet slave women were not entirely excluded from the developments. They could not take advantage of the opportunity given those who volunteered for or were recruited into the armies, but they still adopted the language and tried to use it to improve their situation. Angela Batallas, an Ecuadorian slave demanding her freedom, drew a parallel between her personal freedom and the freedom of her country in language that recalled the words of Bolívar. "I do not believe," she said through her lawyer, "that meritorious members of a republic that . . . have given all necessary proofs of liberalism, employing their arms and heroically risking their lives to liberate us from the Spanish yoke, would want to pledge to keep me in servitude." Indeed, in her quest for justice she appealed directly to the Liberator in March 1823 while he was in Guayaquil.⁷⁰ Other female slaves used the fact of their spouses' enrolment in the army to try to secure benefits, such as obtaining their wages or some form of remuneration, which they could then use to purchase their own freedom.⁷¹ They also, like their husbands, appealed for freedom on the basis of their love of the fatherland. Juliana García, a slave from the Banda Oriental, whose owner was a Spaniard, was with her husband when he joined the invading Buenos Aires troops in 1811. She followed him, together with their three children, for four years through the two sieges of Montevideo, the invasion of Upper Peru, and the patriot defeat at the battle of Sipe-Sipe. When her owner tried to reclaim her, she protested, "I consider myself worthy of being free together with my children, not only as a result of my master having lost all his rights, but also from the patria for my fatigues over more than four years." It was an appealing claim, but sadly for her the authorities decided that the law of enlistment did not apply to women and Rondeau's offer applied only to slaves living in Montevideo.⁷²

70. Townsend, "Half My Body Free," 112–18, and quote from pp. 115–16.

71. See the case of María Antonia Gauna who was seeking the money owed to her dead soldier husband to free herself from slavery, in AGN–BA, Solicitudes militares, 1824, sala X–13–4–8.

72. "La morena Juliana García, esclava que fué de Don Pedro García, reclamando su libertad," AGN–BA, Administrativos, leg. 33, exp. 1179, sala IX–23–8–7.

The termination of the wars of independence neither ended the slaves' use of the now familiar language nor their activism. John Lombardi has written that in Venezuela, "Negro slaves discovered a sense of power during these years as the contending armies wooed their support," and that sense of power continued to be exercised in subsequent years.⁷³ Camilla Townsend found that same sense of power in Ecuador, where there was a new awareness among the slaves, which they tried to use to their own advantage.⁷⁴ Everywhere slaves were attracting notice for their aggressiveness. They were running away, refusing to work, stealing, selling stolen produce, and attacking people. In Peru many abandoned the coastal plantations and joined the bands of highwaymen and guerrillas who were disrupting coastal communications and commerce and threatening political stability. In Venezuela similar acts were blamed on the slaves' belief that "it was the time of freedom."⁷⁵ On one hacienda in 1822 when the manager remonstrated with the black labor force who were refusing to work, they responded by claiming to be free. That same year slaves in Barbacoas, Ecuador, rose charging that the government had decreed abolition but that the cabildo had suppressed it.⁷⁶ They had good reason for such beliefs as anti-slavery legislation had been passed in recent years and they were aware of it. Luciano de los Santos, an Ecuadorian slave, when asking for a new master in 1823, pointed out that "the new regime" must be "in compliance with the laws of the Republic."⁷⁷ In Gran Colombia, Bolívar's law of October 1821 freed the slaves of emigrating Spaniards, and his apparent commitment to the cause of total abolition was well known. Consequently, slaves were fleeing the remaining royalist-held bastions for republican-held territories. Among them were José Antonio Rojas and his wife, who claimed, "We have no desire to live under servitude."⁷⁸ Who could tell who had been the slave of a Spaniard and who was the slave of a patriot, especially where property damage was enor-

73. Lombardi, *The Decline and Abolition of Negro Slavery*, 46.

74. See the case of María del Rosario Barvi, a free *morena* of Lima, seeking the freedom of her daughter, in AA-L, Causas de negros, 1825, leg. 36, exps. 30-32.

75. Blanchard, *Slavery and Abolition*, 12; and "Representación del administrador de la Obra Pía de Chuao, Bartolomé Manrique al intendente," Caracas, 8 Mar. 1822, AGN-C, Gran Colombia, Intendencia de Venezuela, vol. 4, fol. 190.

76. "Comunicación de Juan Antonio de Acha para el intendente del departamento," Choroní, 6 May 1822, AGN-C, Gran Colombia, Intendencia de Venezuela, vol. 83, fol. 329; and Archivo Nacional del Ecuador, Quito, Ecuador (hereafter cited as ANE-Q), Milicias, caja 7, 1820-1823, 4 Nov. 1823.

77. ANE-Q, Esclavos, caja 22, 1818-1824, exp. 17.

78. Slaves seeking freedom, Naguanagua, 5 July 1823, AGN-C, Gran Colombia, Intendencia de Venezuela, vol. 10, fols. 87-92.

mous and large numbers of slave owners had fled or been killed, as was the case in Venezuela? The situation remained chaotic for years with slaves often perceived as central to that chaos. In September 1824, fear of a possible black uprising in Lima prompted local British businessmen to request the landing of British marines. In June 1825, following receipt of a letter from his sister describing Caracas as a city that had become “uninhabitable because of the excesses and threats of domination by the people of color,” Bolívar urged the vice president of Gran Colombia, Francisco de Paula Santander, to send 4,000 men to his homeland.⁷⁹ Over the following decades slave agitation and threats of such agitation remained a continuing reality.

The slaves’ response was not simply the result of the gestures that had been made in their direction during the war years and their contribution to the war effort. It was also tied to the fact that while their nations were now free, slavery remained very much in place. Only Chile rejected the institution, abolishing it in 1823. Elsewhere slavery continued. Slave belligerence was also a response to other sources of frustration. Some of those who had fought found their owners trying to reclaim them on the grounds that they had not served in the army or had not served for a sufficient length of time. When José Ambrosio Surarregui, a Venezuelan slave was reclaimed by his owner, he pointed out that he had volunteered for military service, had served extensively in the naval forces for a number of years, and, consequently, deserved his freedom. Sounding like Bolívar, he argued, “a man who defends this holy right with his blood and with his life cannot be a slave.”⁸⁰ Fortunately for the slaves, appeals to the courts usually were decided in favor of the ex-soldiers, with the courts often echoing the ex-slaves’ words. These were men who had served “under the flags of the patria” to obtain the “precious freedom that has been bought with their blood and services.”⁸¹ A Venezuelan court commented in one such case that:

If political freedom and independence are considered as the dearest rights that we preserve, the domestic liberty that Joaquín Vivas has

79. Lecuna and Bierck, *Selected Writings of Bolívar*, 2:512.

80. “Expediente seguido por José Ambrosio Surarregui reclamando su libertad por haver servido a las tropas de la República,” AANH-C, Civiles-Eslavos, vol. 1829-LRST, exp. 6. For similar Ecuadorian cases, see “El Señor Procurador Municipal, por el esclavo Jacinto Santos, sobre se le declare libre por el servicio hecho de soldado en la República,” 1826, AHG-E, no. 6007; and “El Señor Procurador Municipal en defensa de Antonio Quiñones sobre se le declare libre en atención a los servicios hechos a la República,” 1826, AHG-G, no. 6207.

81. See *Gaceta de Buenos Aires*, no. 42, 14 Feb. 1821, 182. See also AGN-BA, Solicitudes militares, 1824, sala X-13-4-8.

obtained, shaking off the yoke of slavery with that of tyranny, is more valuable to him than even his own life. What would be the reward for his services in honor of the fatherland, if he were reduced to servitude, from which . . . the Congress of Colombia—which conceded freedom to all slaves who loaned their services in the cause of independence—freed him? Would not the remuneration that the fathers of liberty offered to this miserable sector of the state be an illusion? Would it not be possible that some of those who remain under the dominion and yoke of the Spaniards might in time be owners of one of their liberators?⁸²

Slaves also tried to use the new laws, such as the free womb law, to obtain freedom for themselves and their children. Others used court appearances to complain about their lot and to seek changes. Clara Lavalle, a Peruvian slave, seemed to view the laws freeing slaves virtually as abolition decrees. She criticized those laws “that are opposed to freedom and independence” that were still being implemented in Lima. “We slaves enjoy already the freedom to change our Señor,” she noted.⁸³ Another Peruvian slave displayed a similar willingness to challenge her owner and the system. Isabel Verano had quarreled with her master, the mayor of the coastal town of Huaura, and been whipped for her pains. She consequently turned to the courts to obtain a new master. She argued, “We are constituted in republics and enjoying everything of liberty, and it is not acceptable that you deny the miserable slave the only freedom that the law grants him, of [changing owners].” Demonstrating once again the rights that slaves now seemed to believe they possessed, she threatened to appeal to the government if the court refused to act.⁸⁴ Similar challenges, similar defenses of individual rights, similar demands for freedom would be heard until slavery was finally abolished some 30 years later.

The wars of independence had given the black population of Spanish South America an unprecedented opportunity to give voice to their feelings. They had fervently adopted the catchword of the period, freedom. They had helped to secure the independence of their nations and in the process thousands of them had managed to secure their personal freedom. However, their

82. “El Señor Procurador General por el esclavo Joaquín Vivas solicitando se le declare libre, por haber servido en el ejército de la república,” AANH-C, Civiles-Eslavos, vol. 1830-LPV, exp. 4.

83. “Autos que sigue Clara LaValle con Doña Mercedes Palacios,” 20 Sept. 1823, AGN-L, Expedientes Judiciales, Causas civiles, leg. 17, cuad. 7.

84. “Expediente sobre los autos seguidos por la esclava Isabel Verano, para cambiar de amo,” Huaura, 17 Oct. 1825, Biblioteca Nacional, Lima, Peru, no. D12586.

struggle had not ended. Slavery survived despite the burst of liberal initiatives and abolitionist enthusiasm. Even years of chaos and destructive warfare were not sufficient to overcome the influence of the slaveholders and the importance of slavery. But the slaves and freed blacks had at their disposal a lexicon that had proven its effectiveness and was still relevant as they sought to free family members and end slavery once and for all. The wars had ended, but the social struggle continued, and an aroused slave population with a liberating language at their disposal would continue with their attacks until slavery was finally destroyed.