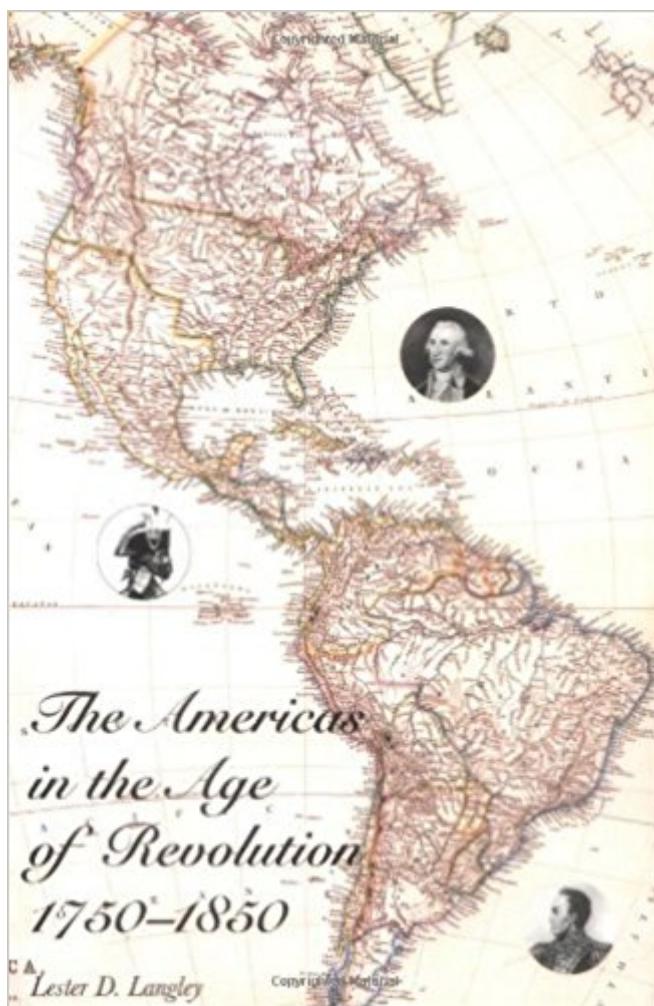


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The Americas In The Age Of Revolution: 1750-1850



Synopsis

This magisterial work is a comparative history of three important revolutions in the Americas: the American Revolution in 1776, the 1791 slave revolt in the French colony that became Haiti, and the prolonged Spanish-American struggle for independence that ended a half century later. Lester Langley describes the movements and events that led to these wars of independence, explaining why revolution took one form in one place and a different form in another. Langley examines the political and social tensions reverberating throughout British, French, and Spanish America, pointing out the characteristics that distinguished each upheaval from the others: the impact of place or location on the course of revolution; the dynamics of race and color as well as class; the relation between leaders and followers; the strength of counterrevolutionary movements; and, especially, the way that militarization of society during war affected the new governments in the postrevolutionary era. Langley argues that an understanding of the legacy of the revolutionary age sheds tremendous light on the political condition of the Americas today: virtually every modern political issue—the relationship of the state to the individual, the effectiveness of government, the liberal promise for progress, and the persistence of color as a critical dynamic in social policy—was central to the earlier period.

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Customer Reviews

Within half a century, three European empires fell to American movements for independence. In this

innovative and sophisticated account of comparative history, Lester D. Langley considers the revolutions in the American colonies, Saint Domingue (later Haiti), and the "Iberoamerican" independence movements in South America. He compares class leadership, racial factors, and the relative violence of each movement. His study alters the typical framework for analyzing American independence as he considers revolution from a dynamic or systemic perspective. Eschewing questions of causation such as "Why did the revolutions occur?" or "What did they achieve?" he explores instead the importance of place and location as well as what the revolts brought in terms of industrialization, militarization, and material progress. Professor Langley's arguments are based in an intriguing understanding of chaos theory, which he applies to the interpretation of historical experience in order to draw out the roles of probability and randomness as constraints on and conditions for the various revolutionary movements. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Every serious scholar of United States or Latin American history should own this book. Although it's not a light read, it is an intriguing study and is a vital complement to bibliography of this field. Revolutionary leaders of this era were profoundly influenced by the successes of those that went before. Langley, a professor of history at the University of Georgia and coauthor (with Thomas Schoonover) of *The Banana Men*, proposes "a portrait of hemispheric political culture in an epoch spanning three wars in the Americas, each of which left a powerful legacy for the new states that took form in their aftermath. In a half-century, three European empires fell to independence movements." This comparative history of the revolutionary age in the Americas emphasizes the social tensions and political upheavals that transformed British North America into the United States, French Saint Domingue into Haiti and Spanish America into South America and Mexico. The author is mindful, however, of the aftermath of violence and the death of empires, and he closely examines the social and political climate of the postrevolutionary periods. But the book is a supplement, not a substitute. While it contains voluminous notes (nearly 70 pages), maps and an index, prior knowledge of the region's history is required for full enjoyment. Langley's study is a valuable matrix of events that can help us better understand the relationships in our hemisphere then and now. Illustrated. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The older I get, the more I'm stunned but what I didn't learn in school. The insights into conflicts raging in post-revolutionary (North) America shed light on what's still pulling the U.S. apart today.

And while I wish the section on South America's revolutionary and post-revolutionary era were longer, the comparison and contrast between the two epochs goes a long way toward understanding why they're so different today - and probably always will be despite globalization.

"The Americas in the Age of Revolution" by Lester D. Langley is a brilliant comparative history of the American, Haitian and Spanish-American revolutions. Presenting a highly informed and unique perspective on how the new world achieved independence with lessons for us today, Mr. Langley deepens our knowledge and understanding. Superbly written for an educated audience including extensive notes and documentation, Mr. Langley's book is intended to satisfy serious readers of 17th and 18th century history. Part 1 is about the revolution from above. Mr. Langley argues that the American revolution benefited from the existence of full-functioning colonial governments that greatly facilitated the task of architecting a new republic. Noting the diversity of interests competing for power both within and without colonial territory, Mr. Langley suggests that the Founding Fathers employed populist rhetoric to win support for a system of government that favored a relatively small group of property holders. The author believes that the template for American empire was crafted when Jefferson successfully promoted expansionism as a means to create a sense of national purpose and provide economic opportunity for the masses. Unable to resolve the contentious issue of slavery until the Civil War many decades later, the United States ultimately emerged from its revolution as the leading capitalist state in the hemisphere. Part 2 is the revolution from below. Mr. Langley suggests the Haitian revolution was memorable not just for its brutality but for its myriad, ever-shifting alliances among groups of participants defined by their ethnic, class and national identities. We learn how Toussaint L'Ouverture's remarkable leadership resulted in a triumph that struck fear throughout the region but subsequently isolated the state from its critical trading partners including the United States. Haiti rewarded the people who struggled for their freedom by implementing an agricultural-based development strategy congruent with its African culture and traditions. Mr. Langley goes on to explain that Haiti's low-growth economy has ever since struggled to pay for the nation's ongoing defense costs while burdening its politics with the legacy of authoritarianism and militarism. Part 3 is the revolution denied. Mr. Langley describes revolutionary Central and South America as consisting of top-down societies that came to reject the Spanish monarchy but were unable to reach wide consensus among its peoples. Mr. Langley writes that the resulting anarchy among competing factions frustrated even the great liberator, Simon Bolivar who found the continent impossible to administer. Recounting decades of tumult with players vying for power at the local, national and international levels, Mr. Langley contends that the region has

suffered for its inability to articulate a unifying social vision. Its weaknesses exploited by powerful, often outside interests, Central and South America has struggled to create shared prosperity and robust democracy for its people. Part 4 is the revolutionary legacy. Mr. Langley compares and contrasts the case studies above to shed light on today's world. Interestingly, Mr. Langley believes that the chaos of revolution partly explains why the respective struggles - which all espoused similar ideals about human freedom - led to widely divergent outcomes. Finally, to the extent that race, gender and class biases remain in the New World, Mr. Langley finds that all of these revolutions have fallen short of their stated goal to achieve full socio-economic equality among their peoples. I highly recommend this extraordinarily insightful book to everyone.

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