Introduction

A Global View on Local Consumption

"Quibdó is the emporium of foreign merchandise for a great extent of very sparsely populated territory," wrote John C. Trautwine, a Philadelphia-born engineer, in 1852.[1] Trautwine had reached "the much-talked-of Quibdó" after a hazardous month's voyage from the Gulf of Urabá, on Colombia's Caribbean coast, up the Atrato River, and had little disposition to move about for two or three days after his arrival. But once he regained his strength, the North American resumed the task of leaving a record of his exploration for an interoceanic canal route across the Pacific lowlands of Colombia.[2] In his account, Trautwine included his verdict on the river town, its commerce, and

[1] John C. Trautwine, *Rough Notes of an Exploration for an Inter-oceanic Canal Route by Way of the Rivers Atrato and San Juan, in New Granada, South America* (Philadelphia: Barnard and Jones, 1854), 37.

[2] Today's Colombia had different names throughout the nineteenth century – the Republic of Colombia (1819–31), which included roughly the modern nations of Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, and Ecuador; Nueva Granada (1831–58); the Confederación Granadina (1858–63); the Estados Unidos de Colombia (1863–86); and the Republic of Colombia (since 1886). Because of these changes Colombia adopted various territorial divisions throughout the nineteenth century. In 1853 the country was divided into provinces, cantons, and districts. The constitutions of 1843 and 1853 ratified the territorial division into provinces. In 1855 the formation of states was approved and with the Constitution of 1863, the process of territorial organization centered around states was completed. The Constitution of 1886 turned states into departments. These departments, in turn, were divided into provinces, and these, into municipal districts. For the sake of clarity, Colombia and Colombians rather than any other name will be used wherever possible.

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its people. "Nearly every house is a shop, in which the systems of selling and bartering extend to every imaginable object that can be procured to sell or barter," he declared. According to Trautwine, twenty to thirty tons of textile fabrics, groceries, crockery, and other foreign merchandise were sent monthly up the river from the old colonial port of Cartagena to Quibdó and the surrounding region. "The great bulk of the articles is of inferior quality, adapted to the necessities and primitive tastes of the poor and semi-civilized negroes and Indians, among whom it is distributed," the North American claimed.[3] To Trautwine's amazement, imported manufactured goods were tailored to satisfy the needs and tastes of those whom he saw with prejudiced eyes.

Three years after Trautwine's visit, a letter crossed the Atlantic with detailed information about the preferences of those whom he had deemed primitive. This was not the first time that the merchant José María Botero Arango was addressing his "*estimados amigos*" (dear friends) at Stiebel Brothers' headquarters in London's Crosby Square with suggestions on textile samples. In his July 1855 letter, the Antioqueño merchant told the company that dark and basic designs were little fancied by his customers. Because of this, Botero Arango, who traded in Santa Fe de Antioquia and Quibdó and would settle in Medellín in 1857, asked for new samples of "sufficient size to recognize their quality" as well as new designs because, in his own words, "they like variety here."[4] He was well aware that not just anything shipped would satisfy the country's diverse population. Trautwine's observation thus rang true. If merchants wished to sell their textiles, machetes, toiletries, and many other imported commodities in Quibdó and its surroundings, they needed to acknowledge local preferences and demands.

By 1890 the US consul in Barranquilla was still insisting on the need to follow such an unnegotiable premise. Johnson Nickeus, stationed in the main port in the Colombian Caribbean, knew that US merchants were still concerned over the little progress made in acquiring a more significant portion of the South American market. With determination, he set about to write a detailed report setting forth "in what respects the manufacturers of Europe excel [US manufacturers] in complying with

[3] Trautwine, *Rough Notes*, 37.

[4] Libro copiador de correspondencia, 1855–57, Archivo Botero Arango e Hijos (hereinafter ABA), Series 227, Sala de Patrimonio Documental Centro Cultural Biblioteca Lev, Universidad EAFIT, Medellín, Colombia, 62.

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the wants, tastes, and peculiarities of the people in preparing and decorating ... merchandise and in packing it for transportation."[5]

To this end, Nickeus wrote at length about the many goods that reached Barranquilla – flour, butter, rice, sugar, sardines, biscuits, crackers, furniture, hardware, machinery, musical instruments, paper and stationery, watches, and clocks. But it was his remarks on cotton textiles that were the most telling in regard to US manufacturers' failures in Colombia. "Cotton goods are by far the most important of all merchandise in this country," he noted, particularly cotton prints – "almost entirely imported from Manchester." As many had done before him, the US consul insisted that locals preferred cotton textiles of very specific dimensions – "the width must be 22 to 23 inches and the pieces of 30 yards exactly." By making prints "wider than consumers want them here, and in unsuitable lengths," US manufacturers were getting nowhere in the Colombian market. In the meantime, Nickeus claimed, "the Manchester firms constantly furnish great varieties of designs from which importers here can select the most suitable to the taste of the market."[6] Predictably his report concluded with some general observations on Colombians' preferences:

> These people have peculiar notions, tastes, and customs, which are the growth of centuries. I am simply stating what has been told our merchants a thousand times by consuls and others, that it is useless to attempt to force on the people our tastes and peculiarities. Our merchants must manufacture goods to suit these people; their tastes must be studied and complied with. This is done in the most careful and minute way by all Europeans, and unless Americans do likewise England, France, and Germany will continue to get the lion's share of the trade.[7]

Appearing somewhat irritated by the stubbornness of those who insisted on ignoring local preferences, Nickeus asked US merchants to "lay aside a little of your independence, send your salesmen with samples, ... ascertain what these people want and give it to them."[8]

Trautwine's, Botero Arango's, and Nickeus's words, whether intentionally or not, offer small windows into the world of goods inhabited by Colombians in the mid-1800s, scattered testimonies of how

[5] Bureau of the American Republics, *How the Latin American Markets May Be Reached by the Manufacturers of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1893), 132.

[6] Bureau of the American Republics, 132–33.

[7] Bureau of the American Republics, 146.

[8] Bureau of the American Republics, 146.

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peasants, *colonos* (settlers), day laborers, formerly enslaved people, *bogas* (river boatmen of African descent), and market women became active agents in the global circulation of modern goods. By piecing out multiple – yet dispersed – depictions of their material world and their intimate relationship with it, *Plebeian Consumers* studies how the material culture of broad sections of nineteenth-century Colombia's population, far from being indigenous, was inextricably intertwined with complex and diverse global processes of production and exchange. It reveals how, in their capacity as free citizens, the country's popular sectors became the largest consumers of foreign commodities in mid nineteenth-century Colombia and dynamic participants of a highly interconnected world.

This book unfolds as both a global and a local story. Methodologically and narratively it shifts "the periphery" to the center of the analysis to offer a new take on global interconnectivity in the nineteenth century, in which the taste of the popular sectors from apparently isolated countries such as Colombia played a key part.[9] With this shift it hopes to open new lines of inquiry into the different ways that peripheral consumers altered global processes from below and critically highlight the multidirectionality, scales, and nuances of nineteenth-century global relationships by studying a wide spectrum of consumer practices and a broad range of everyday goods. To tell this global tale, *Plebeian Consumers* not only follows consumers' preferences and demands but studies how their adoption of foreign goods was in large part due to how merchants and local intermediaries in Colombia conveyed consumers' tastes to manufacturers across the Atlantic. In response to these efforts, as this study will show, British, French, and US retailers were ready to redesign and adapt their products for a predominantly plebeian population. Although on a global scale, Colombians might appear inconsequential to modern historians, they were cherished consumers to nineteenth-century manufacturers of global goods.

[9] Such an approach is a response to the historiography that treats Latin America as the "other." For an interesting discussion of this historiography, see Hilda Sabato, "Historia latinoamericana, historia de América Latina, Latinoamérica en la historia," *Prismas* 19, no. 2 (2015): 135–45. For a discussion of the periphery relevant to my use of the term, see Mary Louise Pratt, "Modernity and Periphery: Toward a Global and Relational Analysis," in *Beyond Dichotomies: Histories, Identitities, Cultures, and the Challenge of Globalization*, ed. Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 21–48.

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By studying global interconnectivity from the margins, I hope to contest Latin America's place in nineteenth-century global history.[10] Focusing on consumption – and not on the production of export commodities, as a good share of economic history has done so far – allows me to forcefully challenge ongoing stereotypes about the region's peripheral role in the world economy and its unquestionable "dependency" on the Global North.[11] Furthermore, by examining how plebeian consumers affected patterns of production in Europe and the United States, I dispute the notion that Colombia's global relationships in the nineteenth century were dictated entirely by outsiders and even more so, by the country's elites. I do so while simultaneously confronting a historical narrative – itself first created in the nineteenth century – of Colombia as a country with self-sufficient regional markets, isolated from the outside world, and incapable of overcoming the fragmentation of its national market.[12]

[10] On the challenges of doing global history for Latin America and why the region has remained on the periphery for this way of writing history, see Matthew Brown, "The Global History of Latin America," *Journal of Global History* 10, no. 3 (2015): 365–86. See also Gabriela de Lima Grecco and Sven Schuster, "Decolonizing Global History? A Latin American Perspective," *Journal of World History* 31, no. 2 (2020): 425–46.

[11] The primary purpose of the first wave of modern economic history in Latin America was to explain how the region gradually set aside the colonial economic model and joined the world market as a supplier of foodstuffs and raw materials for Europe first and then the United States. Because Latin America's global relationships have often been inequitable, these scholars concentrated on exploitative aspects of Latin American production for foreign markets and trade imbalances; priority was given to export-centered explanations of nineteenth-century economic development, which meant that imported manufactured goods were sidelined in the historiography. One of the pioneering works of this wave of history was Tulio Halperín Donghi, *Historia contemporánea de América Latina* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1969). Among the studies that maintain this position, see Enrique Cárdenas, José Antonio Ocampo, and Rosemary Thorp, eds., *An Economic History of Twentieth-Century Latin America. Vol. 1: The Export Age: The Latin American Economies in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Palgrave, 2000); Victor Bulmer-Thomas, John H. Coatsworth, and Roberto Cortés Conde, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of Latin America. Vol. 2: The Long Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence*, 2nd ed. (2003; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[12] Such narratives crafted in the nineteenth century still permeate our current understanding of Colombia's history. Observers, journalists, and scholars at that time gravitated toward the country's backwardness, attributing it variously to population makeup, geography, weak institutions, and feeble economy. Assessing social and economic conditions via metrics such as the number of railways and roads constructed, these lettered men and women openly proclaimed nineteenth-century Colombia as backward in the global theater. This assessment appeared in various forms in the new and more critical

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Plebeian Consumers aims, therefore, to counterbalance these interpretations by depicting nineteenth-century consumers as part of a ceaselessly interdependent world. In this sense, it joins the works of historians who have more broadly questioned the perception, held until very recently, that the nineteenth century was when global exchanges – of objects, ideas, people, and technologies – lost strength and momentum.[13] Indeed, interpretations of the nineteenth century as the moment when Latin American countries turned in on themselves remained ingrained well into the twentieth century. Most of these stressed internal nation-building processes and explored each country's connection with the outside world in light of

interpretations of the national past that emerged by the first half of the twentieth century. The most important of these was offered by historian Luis Eduardo Nieto Arteta, who characterized nineteenth-century Colombia's economy as an "economy of archipelagos." Although subsequent scholars have revised some of Nieto Arteta's views, his idea of the country's fragmentation still resonates. In 1986, for instance, historian Frank Safford maintained the concept of a fragmented economy for Colombia after revisiting the "archipelago" thesis. He claimed that because of "the isolation of local economies, national economic policy was not important to anyone, because Colombia was both economically and politically invertebrate." Frank Safford, "The Emergence of Economic Liberalism in Colombia" in *Guiding the Invisible Hand: Economic Liberalism and the State in Latin American History*, ed. Joseph LeRoy Love and Nils Jacobsen (New York: Praeger, 1988), 35–62, 53. Paradoxically, Safford has been one of the few historians to have paid serious attention to the country's import trade. Luis Eduardo Nieto Arteta, *Economía y cultura en la historia de Colombia* (1942; repr., Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1996), 351, 373; Frank Safford, "Acerca de las interpretaciones socioeconómicas de la política en la Colombia del siglo XIX: Variaciones sobre un tema," trans. Margarita González and María V. Gussoni, *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura*, nos. 13–14 (1985–86): 91–151, 97 (My translation). For works that embrace the fragmentation thesis see, among many, Marco Palacios and Frank Safford, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Frank Safford, "Commerce and Enterprise in Central Colombia, 1821–1870" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1965).

Among the works that address and challenge the fragmentation thesis, see James V. Torres, "Trade in a Changing World: Gold, Silver, and Commodity Flows in the Northern Andes 1780–1840" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2021); Nancy P. Appelbaum, *Mapping the Country of Regions: The Chorographic Commission of Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016). For a discussion of the historiographical debate, see Alexander Betancourt Mendieta, *Historia y nación: Tentativas de la escritura de la historia en Colombia* (2007; repr., Bogotá: Editorial Universidad del Rosario, 2020).

[13] Historians have started to challenge this view. See Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller, America in the World (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015). Osterhammel, however, touches on Latin American briefly. In 2022 the first issue of the journal *Global Nineteenth-Century Studies* was published. The journal was created as a forum for scholars from a wide array of disciplines who share an interest in the world's connectedness between 1750 and 1914.

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such processes.[14] The result was a good share of works on nineteenth-century Latin America that predominantly explain internal processes of national formation as well as the place of foreign ideas and resources in said processes, thereby overlooking the impact of the region's ordinary women and men on other geographical spaces in intellectual, political, and economic terms.

One could have hoped that the rise of global history would offer new interpretations of nineteenth-century Latin America by compensating for nation-state-based histories and repositioning the region's relationship within global networks. However, as various Latin American scholars have recently noted, global history has not radically changed the region's place in Western historiography, leaving Latin American history in general and nineteenth-century history in particular underrepresented.[15] There are many reasons for this, one being that global history scholars have been primarily occupied with exploring the power dynamics between China, South Asia, and Europe, finding it challenging to place Latin America in their narratives. Such historiographical emphases have had major interpretative results, namely they have relegated Latin America once again to the "periphery" and have rendered its nineteenth-century historical actors as passive participants in global transformations. The same can be said of the global turn in the history of consumption. Although initially studies on consumption focused on the origins and expansion of the consumer society in Europe and North America,[16] later scholars turned to new histories and geographies of consumption, which included excellent works on China and India and countries in Africa.[17] This new focus did result in important studies in the

[14] De Lima Grecco and Schuster, "Decolonizing Global History?," 434.

[15] For examples of how global and world historians that sideline Latin America, see Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (2004; repr., Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012); Osterhammel, *Transformation of the World*; Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (2014; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 2015).

[16] Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Europa Publications, 1982); Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, eds., *The Culture of Consumption in America: Critical Essays in American History, 1880–1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

[17] See, among many other works, Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation* (2003; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

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last two decades on Latin America's history of consumption, but very few of these studies centered on the nineteenth century.[18]

Historians of the Atlantic world, for their part, have challenged the peripheral nature of Latin America. Still, Atlanticists have been cautious in incorporating the nineteenth century into their histories, stopping at the 1820s, with the end of the Age of Revolutions.[19] This has, once again, silenced various actors' contributions to global processes in nineteenth-century Latin America. As historian James E. Sanders has stated, "ending studies of the Atlantic world in the early nineteenth century has worked to obscure the importance of ... later political struggles and their Atlantic character, thereby emphasizing events and processes in the North Atlantic, while ignoring sites of democratic innovation such as Colombia."[20] In a similar vein, Matthew Brown has called historians to spend more energy investigating the influence that Latin America had on the rest of the world in the mid nineteenth century, the moment when Latin America embraced and was embraced by the global, in culture as well as in commerce.[21] *Plebeian Consumers* shares these concerns, and

[18] For some noteworthy exceptions to this exclusion of nineteenth-century Latin America from the history of consumption, see Benjamin Orlove, ed., *The Allure of the Foreign: Imported Goods in Postcolonial Latin America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Arnold J. Bauer, *Goods, Power, History: Latin America's Material Culture* (2001; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Arnold Bauer's is one of the most cited contributions on this subject. However, he turns to the concept of "material culture" rather than to consumption. Also worth mentioning is Manuel Llorca-Jaña, *The British Textile Trade in South America in the Nineteenth Century* (2012; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). For studies on twentieth-century consumption in Latin America, see Natalia Milanesio, *Workers Go Shopping in Argentina: The Rise of Popular Consumer Culture* (2013; repr., Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015); Eduardo Elena, *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011); Steven B. Bunker, *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Díaz* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012). Heidi Tinsman, *Buying into the Regime: Grapes and Consumption in Cold War Chile and the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

[19] As historian José Moya has underscored, the concept of the Atlantic world "is applicable more to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century than to previous or later periods." José C. Moya, "Modernization, Modernity, and the Trans/formation of the Atlantic World in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Atlantic in Global History, 1500–2000*, ed. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Erik R. Seeman (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006), 187–207, 187.

[20] James E. Sanders, "Atlantic Republicanism in Nineteenth-Century Colombia: Spanish America's Challenge to the Contours of Atlantic History," *Journal of World History* 20, no. 1 (2009): 131–50, 133.

[21] Brown, "Global History of Latin America," 379. Similarly, Moya argues in favor of embracing a new kind of Atlantic in the long nineteenth century – different from the Atlantic conceptualized for the early modern period – that stemmed from unprecedented

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thus it stresses the dynamic and fluid global connections of Latin America's popular sectors in the second half of the nineteenth century. This requires, as mentioned, not positing a priori that Colombia was a fragmented republic and Latin America was a dependent region, even while recognizing the many political and economic challenges that the country and region faced throughout the nineteenth century.

As much as *Plebeian Consumers* tells a global and connected story, it also tells a local tale of struggles for citizenship and political recognition in which plebeian consumption plays a key role. This is a different kind of story about popular actors than the one often told by the historiography so far. In the past two decades, historians of Latin America have broadly studied popular men and women to understand their role as political actors in the new republics, explore the obstacles they faced in acquiring land and protecting their property rights, recognize the trials that freedmen and freedwomen encountered after emancipation, and grasp the struggles for citizenship of Indigenous, Black, and mixed-race inhabitants.[22] These studies owe much to previous scholarship on Colombia's nineteenth-century artisan republicanism, peasant movements, and republican politics and free elections, all of which have deepened our understanding of the country's political culture during this period.[23]

transformations in people, commerce, ideas, capital, and technology. Moya, "Modernization," 187–207.

[22] This literature is too vast to cite in full. Among the most recent studies, see James E. Sanders, *Contentious Republicans: Popular Politics, Race, and Class in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Marixa Lasso, *Myths of Harmony: Race and Republicanism during the Age of Revolution, Colombia 1795–1831* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007); Jason McGraw, *The Work of Recognition: Caribbean Colombia and the Postemancipation Struggle for Citizenship* (2014; repr., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Marcela Echeverri, *Indian and Slave Royalists in the Age of Revolution: Reform, Revolution, and Royalism in the Northern Andes, 1780–1825* (2016; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Claudia Leal, *Landscapes of Freedom: Building a Postemancipation Society in the Rainforests of Western Colombia* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018).

[23] Malcolm Deas, "La presencia de la política nacional en la vida provinciana, pueblerina y rural de Colombia en el primer siglo de la República," in *Del poder y la gramática y otros ensayos sobre historia, política y literatura colombianas* (1993; repr., Bogotá: Taurus, 2006), 175–206; Catherine LeGrand, *Frontier Expansion and Peasant Protest in Colombia, 1850–1936* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); David Sowell, *The Early Colombian Labor Movement: Artisans and Politics in Bogotá, 1832–1919* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, *Curso y discurso del movimiento plebeyo, 1849–1854* (Bogotá: Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales, 1995); Margarita Garrido, *Reclamos y representaciones: Variaciones sobre la política en el Nuevo Reino de Granada, 1770–1815*

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Altogether, this literature has reassessed the nineteenth century – a period once viewed as the heyday of caudillos, anarchic turmoil, and misrule – as an age of liberal experimentation and struggles for political recognition. By so doing, historians have challenged the teleological perspectives underlying the scholarship that had cast nineteenth-century Spanish America's political volatility as a symptom of the "failed" modernization of its new polities. Scholars have also called for repositioning Latin America at the vanguard of republicanism in the modern Atlantic world[24] and invited historians to rethink the origins and meanings of republicanism through a critical analysis of the political practices of a diverse and wide variety of Latin America's historical actors.[25] The latter embracing a multilayered view of citizenship in the nineteenth century that welcomes the idea that citizenship was exercised and fought over in multiple arenas, including the ballot box, the public sphere, and the battlefield.[26]

This book adds to and critically addresses this new body of work by reconsidering popular groups and republican politics at this time through the lens of political economy and the everyday practices of economic life. By exploring how the popular sectors in mid nineteenth-century Colombia participated in the market economy not only as laborers but as individuals who adopted new commodities, *Plebeian Consumers* studies the extent to which their role as consumers shaped ideas and practices of citizenship. It argues that for those in power as well as for those seeking to be recognized as political subjects, citizenship was inevitably tied to

(Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1993); Eduardo Posada-Carbó, ed., *Elections before Democracy: The History of Elections in Europe and Latin America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Mario Aguilera Peña, *Insurgencia urbana en Bogotá: Motín, conspiración y guerra civil, 1893–1895* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1997).

[24] On calls to consider Latin American as republicanism's vanguard, see Hilda Sabato, *Republics of the New World: The Revolutionary Political Experiment in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 7; James E. Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World: Creating Modernity, Nation, and Democracy in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 9; Jeremy Adelman, "Liberalism and Constitutionalism in Latin America in the 19th Century," *History Compass* 12, no. 6 (2014): 508–16. On calls to critically analyze political practices, see Sanders, *Vanguard of the Atlantic World*, 4; Sanders, "Atlantic Republicanism."

[25] Sanders, *Vanguard of the Atlantic World*, 4; Sanders, "Atlantic Republicanism."

[26] For a review of the historiography, see Hilda Sabato, "On Political Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century Latin America," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 4 (2001): 1290–315.

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their participation in the marketplace as consumers. The book shows that although the relationship between citizenship, consumption, and the marketplace took form in print, in lettered debates on political economy, and in the ruling elites' scientific and institutional spaces, it was also being shaped and negotiated in the public square, the store, and the weekly market. Men and women joined spaces of exchange not only to participate in political debate – discussing politics in stores, fairs, seaports, and haciendas – but to self-fashion and be validated by their peers as worthy citizens – wearing their best clothes and machetes on market day.

Hence, this study contends that foreign goods became the means through which plebeian consumers in mid nineteenth-century Colombia recognized themselves and sought recognition from their peers as individuals vested with rights and dignity, with all the intricate questions raised by the gendered and racial character of citizenship. Accessing these acts of political recognition requires critically approaching the archive to search for the meanings that thousands of men and women gave to their world of goods.

I.1 CONSUMERS AND THEIR FRAGMENTARY ARCHIVAL PRESENCE

Many of the peasants, day laborers, market women, and formerly enslaved people who form the core of this book did not leave paper trails. If there are traces of what plebeian consumers felt or desired, the sources that contain them likely have biases that distort their experiences. To ferret out the cultural, political, and social meanings of commodities from the traditional archive, I creatively resort to different methodologies and strategies. I mine the words of government authorities, merchants, and consuls for clues as to how everyday men and women made sense of and gave order to their world of goods. I try to account for the cultural, social, and emotional biases of those who created written records of peasants', day laborers', and market women's material world. I turn to contemporary literature for representations of local consumer practices, reading against the author's perspective to reach those being represented. And I critically explore commercial handbooks, travelers' accounts, memoirs, local newspapers, conduct manuals, and government and business records for evidence of Colombians' material life.

Reading *against the archival grain* allows me to find fragments of consumers' lives in an invoice, a shipping order, a customs report, and a tariff law, among many other primary sources, and with these fragments

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imagine the multiple meanings that men and women gave to foreign goods.[27] Marginal annotations in commercial correspondence, official reports, and merchants' ledgers, for instance, hold impressive value for piecing together plebeian consumers' tastes, preferences, and practices. Thus, when confronting the archive, I place special weight on instances when travelers and statesmen, oftentimes reluctantly, register events or details that they did not expect. I constantly question what is being silenced by the sources and the archive itself.[28] I remain attentive to the many counternarratives that each representation engenders, the stories that are not foregrounded. Such attention proves to be particularly powerful for analyzing visual representations of Colombians' material realities, such as watercolors, photographs, and drawings.

This exercise of imagination and interpretation[29] – that demands historians to go back to "their" sources, over and over again – is guided by explanatory models in both cultural history and anthropology for how to engage with material culture and consumption practices. At least four main principles drawn from these disciplines inform my method. The first is that objects and their exchange create and shape culture and thus inform human and social processes. In the last four decades, anthropologists, sociologists, and historians have shown that consumption cannot be reduced to a given individual's rational and cost-minimizing choices. If social scientists agree on anything regarding consumption, it is that it is a social and collective activity whose study must encompass much more than the choice of one commodity over another.[30] Consumption is,

[27] For examples of such an approach to the archive, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (1987; repr., Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1–14, 1; Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 1.

[28] On this mode of confronting the archive, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87–109; Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[29] For the role of imagination and fiction in the writing of history, see Sue Peabody, "Microhistory, Biography, Fiction: The Politics of Narrating the Lives of People under Slavery," *Transatlantica* 2 (2012): 1–19; Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*.

[30] The literature on this point is extensive. For an introduction from an interdisciplinary perspective, see Daniel Miller, ed., *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies* (1995; repr., London: Routledge, 2002); Daniel Miller, ed., *Consumption: Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences. Vol. 1: Theory and Issues in the Study of Consumption* (London: Routledge, 2001); John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds.,

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therefore, an act of negotiation, adaptation, resistance, and domestication rather than a straightforward imposition of goods on consumers by manufacturers, the state, or the market.

This perspective allows us to embrace a broad definition of the act of consuming, one that encompasses not only the acquisition of goods but also the meanings and practices of exchange: how objects are bought, how and why they are used and kept, whether they are inherited or disposed of, and in what spaces they are consumed and showcased. It also requires us to acknowledge that objects do not merely reflect culture but are the means by which it is created and transformed, and that commodities not only symbolize and communicate intangible ideas but build social relationships and alter social structures.[31] From this point of view, consumers become active subjects in their world of goods and commodities, agents and sometimes allies in the construction of social, cultural, and political identities.[32]

Naturally, there are many ways by which humans give meanings to objects. Historians must resort to different analytical strategies to uncover – at least partially or tentatively – the meanings of goods. To begin with, goods may come packed with specific associations and connotations through production, distribution, and advertising. Hence, by assessing both the structures of production and the roles of manufacturers, designers, and merchants in the consumption process, scholars can come closer to understanding their cultural value. However, the meanings of goods can always be renegotiated or made irrelevant through what

Consumption and the World of Goods (1994; repr., London: Routledge, 2005); Ben Fine, *The World of Consumption: The Material and Cultural Revisited*, 2nd ed. (2002; repr., London: Routledge, 2007); Frank Trentmann, "Beyond Consumerism: New Historical Perspectives on Consumption," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 3 (2004): 373–401; Frank Trentmann, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (2012; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*, rev. ed. (1996; repr., London: Routledge, 2006).

[31] Douglas and Isherwood, *World of Goods*; Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (1987; repr., Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979); David Howes, ed., *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities* (1996; repr., London: Routledge, 2006).

[32] Rosemary A. Joyce, "History and Materiality," in *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences: An Interdisciplinary, Searchable, and Linkable Resource*, ed. Robert A. Scott and Stephen M. Kosslyn (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2015), 1–16.

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people do with them, how they talk about them,[33] and how objects move through different contexts.[34] Consequently, I pay special attention to how commodities circulate and how men and women consume them.[35] I embrace the notion that objects' trajectories – or "paths" – also shape their cultural meanings and their social and political value. Tracing an object's trajectory allows historians to visualize why it acquires greater relevance in one place than another, why goods that become "necessities" for some become "luxuries" for others, and why some are meaningful and others meaningless objects. Such an approach also forces scholars to appreciate the politics undergirding an object's circulation in a given space and time.

This leads me to the second principle that I derive from cultural history and anthropology approaches to materiality and consumption: value, broadly defined as the quality that renders a commodity desirable, is determined in multiple ways. In mid nineteenth-century Colombia, for instance, some people valued an object most when it remained beyond their reach; others valued goods that appeared "foreign" over actual imported commodities that looked less so. As Ann Smart Martin has rightly argued, an awareness of how worth was perceived allows historians to address how people used material goods to navigate change – particularly, in the case of *Plebeian Consumers*, social and political change.[36] We must also be aware of how such perceptions of worth were shaped by gender, race, and ethnicity.

Recognizing the multiplicity of meanings that men and women give to their material world takes me to the third principle guiding the book's analysis: there is no such thing as a "correct" consumption of a given commodity.[37] Stating otherwise suggests that that culture is fixed. Quite

[33] Ian Woodward, "Domestic Objects and the Taste Epiphany: A Resource for Consumption Methodology," *Journal of Material Culture* 6, no. 2 (2001): 115–36.

[34] Sophie Woodward, "Meaningful Objects and Consumption," in *The Oxford Handbook of Consumption*, ed. Frederick F. Wherry and Ian Woodward (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 167–78, 167.

[35] Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in Appadurai, *Social Life of Things*, 64–91.

[36] Ann Smart Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia* (2008; repr., Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 10.

[37] On this point, see Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World*; Frank Dikötter, *Exotic Commodities: Modern Objects and Everyday Life in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Howes, *Cross-Cultural Consumption*; Jean Comaroff, "The Empire's Old Clothes: Fashioning the Colonial Subject," in Howes, *Cross-Cultural Consumption*, 19–38.

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to the contrary, culture is constantly changing.[38] *Plebeian Consumers*, therefore, embraces the idea that there is no such thing as an authentic appropriation of an object and as a consequence, strongly acknowledges that consumption across borders or social class does not inherently involve processes of resistance or emulation.[39]

The final principle guiding the book's methodology is that, when tracing the meanings of goods, we must reckon with their very materiality. Archaeologists, art historians, and historians of science have shown that objects have agency and, consequently, that things are not passive vessels in which meaning is placed. Objects can resist or exceed human intentions through their material propensities[40] – color, size, texture, weight, and design all affect how things might lend themselves to different cultural meanings and to what extent people can reappropriate objects or subvert their original purpose. By embracing the complexity of the relationship between subjects and objects, social scientists have shown that meanings arise from the coagency of people and things.[41] Historians need to take the materiality of things seriously when determining their meanings, even if the objects in question no longer exist.

That these principles for dealing with material culture and consumption practices emphasize the ability of individuals to give multiple meanings to things should not be misread as a claim on the part of cultural history and anthropology scholars that consumers have unlimited options. Purchasing power is one of the most obvious restrictions, and

[38] Marshall Sahlins, "Two or Three Things that I Know about Culture," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5, no. 3 (1999): 399–421.

[39] Thorstein Veblen and Norbert Elias first formulated the theory of consumer emulation. Recent scholars have questioned this theory, among them historians Maxine Berg, Colin Jones, Woodruff Smith, Dena Goodman, Amanda Vickery, and Lorna Weatherill, as well as sociologist Colin Campbell. Although Pierre Bourdieu seems to reinforce the emulation thesis insofar as he stresses consumption's role in social differentiation, he demonstrates that lower social groups are not necessarily inclined to imitate their sociocultural superiors. I make a similar claim not only in terms of the dynamics behind consumption between social classes but also in terms of the consumption of foreign goods by "peripheral" consumers.

[40] Frank Trentmann, "Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics," *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 2 (2009): 283–307; Joyce, "History and Materiality."

[41] Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Webb Keane, "Signs Are Not the Garb of Meaning: On the Social Analysis of Material Things," in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 182–205.

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in mid nineteenth-century Colombia it was certainly one of the most significant obstacles to acquiring foreign goods. Capitalists' interests are also paramount in determining what reaches consumers. Social scientists have also shown how political and social forces restrict access to goods.[42] Local regulations on commerce, import tariffs, and sumptuary laws are good examples, as are social norms that dictate patterns of "proper" and acceptable consumption practices – in gendered, racial, and class terms. In other words, the consumers' field of play has its own historical limits and material restrictions; no consumer is entirely creative, just as no consumer is entirely passive. Historians of consumption, therefore, must deal with the ever-present tension between what a consumer wants to do and what her environment allows her to do.[43] In *Plebeian Consumers*, this means questioning the premise that Colombia's popular sectors were always drawn to cheaper imported goods and willing to sacrifice quality over price. As this study will show, price was far from their only motivation for choosing one commodity over another. Even if their income was low and their saving capacity limited, women and men in mid-1800s Colombia purchased foreign goods for multiple and sometimes conflicting reasons, including subsistence, prestige, utility, quality, status, and, no less critical, political recognition.

Finally, *Plebeian Consumers* also recognizes that in mid nineteenth-century Colombia consumers' motives were multilayered and their tastes were heterogeneous. As I will show, consumers' tastes and preferences differed throughout the country, as did the meanings of the goods, and it would be wrong to assume that all "peasants" or "laborers" – themselves not homogeneous categories – favored the same goods regardless of their environment, activities, and access to foreign markets. *Plebeian Consumers* embraces such differences. However, because I primarily explore the different ways that commodities were received, transformed, or rejected by everyday men and women in mid nineteenth-century Colombia, the book will give precedence to commodities' trajectories and their reception rather than regional tastes and desires.

[42] Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in Appadurai, *Social Life of Things*, 3–63.

[43] I embrace in particular Jan de Vries's view that "consumer aspirations have a history; they are not simply the second-order consequences of other, more fundamental forces, nor are they autonomous acts of creative individuality." Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (2008; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ix.

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I.2 COLOMBIA IN THE GLOBAL NINETEENTH CENTURY

Plebeian Consumers takes as its focus the period between the 1850s and the 1910s, a time of unprecedented transformation in the transatlantic circulation of goods, capital, ideas, and people. The new Atlantic world increased its relative importance on the global scale compared to the early modern period. A demographic revolution allowed for a massive flow of fifty-one million European peasants and proletarians to the Americas, transforming social and political connections between both continents and augmenting their respective proportions of the globe's population. The Industrial Revolution created a strong demand for North and South American raw materials (cotton, wool, hides, guano, nitrates, and rubber) and, by promoting urbanization in northwest Europe, expanded consumer demand for commodities such as sugar, coffee, tobacco, and cacao.

In Europe, industrial cities grew and urban centers multiplied, turning English, French, German, and Italian manufacturers into conspicuous exporters of new commodities for consumers across the Atlantic. Britain, France and the United States – who by the 1800s accounted for less than one-tenth of the world's manufacturing – raised for "almost one-half of the world's output by the end of the century."[44] All these changes were accompanied by a revolution in technology that enabled a dynamic flow of commodities between both sides of the Atlantic. Steamships increasingly replaced sailing vessels, changing the pace of marine transportation in a manner essential for massive transatlantic trade. Railroads facilitated the inland transportation of goods and merchandise from both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts: textiles reached Liverpool from throughout Britain and were shipped to the Colombian Caribbean, and tons of grain arrived from the countryside to the port of Buenos Aires and were dispatched to feed the men and women across the Atlantic.

Still, the expansion of transatlantic commerce would not have been possible without a significant political commitment to economic liberalism and free trade. In England, the abolition of the Corn Laws in 1846 set the tone for what was to come. Whereas protective tariffs survived there, they did so amid an enthusiastic strengthening of property rights, the privatization of the commons, the lifting of mercantilist restrictions on trade, and the commercialization of agriculture. In Latin America, many countries embraced economic liberalism, which remained

[44] Moya, "Modernization," 191–92.

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the dominant paradigm in the region between 1850 and 1890.[45] Reforms similar to those that occurred in England were carried out in almost all Latin American countries during that period, removing or substantially reducing the primary institutional constraints on free trade inherited from the colonial era. In most cases, the reform process began by eliminating state monopolies, a vast range of domestic taxes and duties, and colonial property rights, before moving on to privatizing public lands and attracting foreign capital and labor.[46]

Colombia was no exception to this trend (Figure I.1). As the republic turned thirty years old, tobacco and gold production was liberalized. The resultant surge of tobacco production in the Magdalena Valley and gold production in the three provinces of what would later comprise the state of Antioquia put at the country's disposal enough natural products to exchange for foreign goods and enough resources to improve navigation through the Magdalena River. Consequently, ships started to arrive in Colombian ports more frequently by midcentury, bringing every type of commodity. Cotton textiles, hardware, books, musical instruments, weapons, beer, and sugar reached the Caribbean port of Cartagena, and the customhouse of Buenaventura welcomed hats, sugar mills, machetes, ponchos, soaps, and printing presses via the Pacific.

This economic expansion coincided with an expansion, no matter how incomplete and contentious, of the franchise and popular political participation in the public sphere took new forms. As historian James E. Sanders has demonstrated, mid nineteenth-century Colombia saw the emergence of what he terms "a new postcolonial or national form of bargaining ... whose most salient features were that it was less personalistic, more public, more programmatic, and, most important, republican."[47] Although popular demands grew from local needs, in the mid-1800s those participating in political negotiations started to concern

[45] David Bushnell, "Assessing the Legacy of Liberalism," in *Liberals, Politics, and Power: State Formation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*, ed. Vincent C. Peloso and Barbara A. Tenenbaum (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 278–300; Iván Jakšić and Eduardo Posada-Carbó, *Liberalismo y poder: Latinoamerica en el Siglo XIX* (Santiago: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011).

[46] Nils Jacobsen, "'Liberalismo tropical': Cómo explicar el auge de una doctrina económica europea en América Latina, 1780–1885," *Historia Crítica*, no. 34 (2007): 118–47, 141. See also John H. Coatsworth, "Economic and Institutional Trajectories in Nineteenth-Century Latin America," in *Latin America and the World Economy since 1800*, ed. John H. Coatsworth and Alan M. Taylor (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 23–54.

[47] Sanders, *Contentious Republicans*, 3.

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FIGURE I.1 United States of Colombia, 1863. Map created by Yoly Velandria.

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themselves perceptibly with the needs and rights of an abstract "we." Liberal and conservative ruling elites knew they had to negotiate with various sectors to hold onto power. Political candidates had to work the electorate, and short-lived alliances between popular groups and local elites formed while they shared common goals.

Hence, the middle of the century marks a profound transformation in fights over subalterns' political participation in both Colombia and the Atlantic world more broadly. In the former, the liberal project was challenged by a section of the ruling elites from the mid-1870s to the early 1880s, particularly in the political sphere.[48] However, as I will show, the constitutional and legal changes of the 1880s, which definitively contracted political spaces, did not drastically curb plebeian consumption practices, just as they did not deeply curb foreign merchants' efforts to conquer new markets. The commercial dynamics in both hemispheres will only radically change with the first decade of the twentieth century and the prelude to World War I. This explains why I have chosen to extend the book's focus to the 1910s. I do so, however, while recognizing the different rhythms of the political, social, and cultural processes that I explore across the period.

All these processes form the background for *Plebeian Consumers*. Chapter 1 explores how the elites' economic republican project based on the modern science of political economy, was closely linked to ordinary people's desire to consume foreign goods. I argue that for those in power and those seeking recognition as political subjects, ideas and practices of citizenship were inevitably tied to participation as consumers in the marketplace – understood here not as a mere container of economic transactions but as a node of complex social processes and a creator of cultural and political activity.[49] By so doing, I show that in nineteenth-century Colombia, as Malcolm Deas pointed out, politics was everywhere, and the marketplace was no exception.[50]

Before I address the connections between plebeian consumption and citizenship on the ground, I must explore the complex dynamics of

[48] Eduardo Posada-Carbó, "Elections and Civil Wars in Nineteenth-Century Colombia: The 1875 Presidential Campaign," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26, no. 3 (1994): 621–49; Frédéric Martínez, *El nacionalismo cosmopolita: La referencia europea en la construcción nacional en Colombia, 1845–1900* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 2001).

[49] For a similar approach to the notion of the marketplace, see Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750* (1986; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[50] Deas, "La presencia de la política nacional."

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Colombia's post-1850 import trade, the subject of Chapter 2. This chapter traces how foreign objects – textiles, machetes, toiletries, food, and chinaware, among many other goods – circulated throughout the national geography: the routes they traveled and the places they visited. The chapter also explores the many places in which peasants, bogas, formerly enslaved people, and small landholders came to exchange and give meaning to them.

The third and fourth chapters study the political, cultural, and economic impact of foreign textiles and agricultural tools, respectively. Using the recorded experiences of foreign merchants and local shopkeepers, literature, and visual sources, Chapter 3 delves into how the tastes and preferences of Colombia's popular consumers influenced the production of textiles abroad. It shows how their demands for specific colors, designs, and shapes were communicated through a chain of intermediaries to manufacturers in the United States and England, who risked having their merchandise returned and losing customers if they failed to comply. The chapter emphasizes that the terms of trade were influenced not only by US and European interests but also by the preferences of everyday Colombian men and women who actively shaped the republic's marketplace. Chapter 4 explores another instance of popular demands regarding the quality of goods imported to Colombia. As I go on to show in this chapter the consumption of imported machetes and other agricultural tools might provide the clearest demonstration of plebeian consumers' active and demanding attitude toward foreign merchandise. Foreign machetes also helped to strengthen and consolidate the identity of Colombian popular groups, along with their claim to citizenship and their sense of belonging to the body politic.

Chapter 5 turns to elite consumption of foreign luxury goods. This detour from the book's narrative of popular consumption is necessary in order to question the historiography that has equated "foreign goods" with "luxury goods." I look at how nineteenth-century Colombian elites incorporated European luxury consumer goods – clocks, books, umbrellas, clothing, and musical instruments – into practices of social distinction and cultural expression in a reaction against ordinary people's way of life. In this way, the chapter highlights that, when it came to their own consumption, the category of "foreign commodities" in nineteenth-century Colombia was flexible for the members of the upper classes, with particular political and social ramifications.

The consumption of some foreign items, as Chapter 5 shows, was closely linked in Colombian society with ideas and ideals of "propriety"

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and "decency." I further explore this linkage in Chapter 6 by turning to the consumption of patent medicines and toiletries and their impact on the Colombian market. By following their distribution, we can understand the mechanisms and strategies employed by foreign manufacturers to infiltrate the market and gain widespread attention. This chapter shows how producers of patent medicines were the first to introduce modern advertising techniques to Colombians. As a result of such advertising, popular sectors were gradually incorporated into the world of foreign nostrums and toiletries, embracing the ideas that these commodities promoted and enforced. Yet in spite of this, as the chapter goes on to demonstrate, Colombian men and women still domesticated these goods and transformed their uses and their meanings in interesting and often unpredictable ways.

Plebeian Consumers ends by critically assessing how successful the ruling elites were in their republican project of turning peasants, and day laborers into modern citizens through consumption and economic integration. This critique proceeds by emphasizing the tensions between plebeian and elite attitudes toward consumption and citizenship by the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. I also invite global historians and historians of Latin America to ask new questions about capitalism and globalization "in the margins" by studying consumption from below. This, so as to interrogate the entrenched narratives of underdevelopment and dependency that still permeate our historical interpretations about Latin America today.

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