

2. Thomas Moore, *Corruption and Intolerance: Two Poems, with Notes, Addressed to an Englishman by an Irishman* (London: Carpenter, 1808), p. 2.

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Linda Colley, *The Gun, the Ship, and the Pen: Warfare, Constitutions, and the Making of the Modern World* (London: Profile Books, 2021), 512pp. ISBN 978-1-8466-8498-2; £10.99 (pb).

HISTORIAN LINDA COLLEY'S SWEEPING NEW BOOK *The Gun, the Ship, and the Pen: Warfare, Constitutions, and the Making of the Modern World* is over four hundred pages, covers almost four hundred years and spans the globe to show how developments in warfare drove the act of writing constitutions around the world. Colley tells her story at a page-turning pace. She writes that the spread of constitutions from the eighteenth century onwards 'has generally been put down to the impact of revolutions, not war' (p. 4). This orthodox approach, Colley argues, is 'unduly narrowing and mislead[ing]'. She argues instead that changes in warfare led to the writing of constitutions. As Colley anchors this process in war instead of revolution, she divorces constitutions from democracy; some constitutions and democracy go in hand in hand, but it is not taken for granted—by Colley or by the writers of constitutions themselves—that they do. The wide geographic swath and long timeframe of *The Gun, the Ship, and the Pen* are essential to Colley's narrative of the central role of war in the creation of political documents that are widely assumed to be based in revolutionary contexts and democratic impulses, but need not be.


Colley scans the globe as she chronicles how war makes constitutions. She first sets her scene in Corsica where she finds Pasquale Paoli 'drafting a ten-page constitution, a term (*costituzione*) he explicitly employed' (p. 18). In Haiti, she locates a political revolution that was 'remarkable' both because it brought about 'a Black-ruled polity equipped with a constitution' and acted as a 'confirmation of trends and developments [of maritime reach] [...] in other regions of the world' (p. 44). Moving to Russia, Colley shows that Catherine the Great was deeply invested in writing a constitution, her *Nakaz*, as a woman monarch determined to secure her own authority amidst the 'shocks and trails of escalating levels of war' (p. 68). In South America, Colley identifies states that were not only writing constitutions, but self-consciously using print and the printing of constitutions as part of their political projects. Colley also locates meaningful constitutional

innovations on Pitcairn Island, in Tahiti, on the Hawaiian Islands, in Tunisia, in Ethiopia and in Japan. France, Britain and America all certainly get some of Colley's attention, but they do not exert a magnetic pull in her narrative; there are too many other places to visit.

Colley's broad geographic reach is part of how she splits off the writing of constitutions from revolution, democracy and state-building. The sheer breadth of places where constitutions were written vividly dramatises the shortcomings of yoking that activity to any specific political project, or version of political causation. The specifics and content of the documents themselves certainly get their due in Colley's hands, but it is the very fact that they were written at all and written in so many places that stands out.

Colley's concerns—war, constitutions and the modern world—are vital today, but *The Gun, the Ship, and the Pen* is a densely detailed, fast-moving narrative about the past. Colley begins in 1775: that date might suggest that her jumping off point is the US Constitution, but it is not. In fact, she uses the 1750s, 60s and 70s to chart developments in warfare and the political fallout of warfare. For Colley, these decades show why 'responses to these war-related disturbances and shifts increasingly take the form of new written texts' (p. 55). The Napoleonic Wars are crucial for Colley because the combination of land and naval warfare increased the geographic reach of violence. After the revolutions of 1848 (and the big exception to revolution, England), Colley highlights the sheer volume of violence and reach of warfare in the 1860s. For Colley, the time between the long 1860s and the First World War is a time of 'armed violence', 'audacity' and innovation (p. 400). Her discussion of the First World War emphasises its massive geographic scale, the lethality of the weaponry employed in it and the revolutionary political documents drafted in the wake of cataclysm. When she does turn to today in the Epilogue, she is less concerned with how technology is changing warfare, the importance of non-state actors, conflict below the threshold of war or even resurgent nationalism—any and all of which might be suggested by what came before in the book. Instead, Colley focuses on the fact of writing and the role of print to emphasise how the screen today dominates how people get their political news and engage with politics in our digital age. She also highlights the profound effects of altering political documents to shore up the power of a single individual; she uses Vladimir Putin's changes to the Russian constitution to particular effect.

Colley is British by birth, but teaches at Princeton. For both Britons and Americans, the idea that the political and constitutional order is strained by war should resonate strongly and loudly in a post-9/11 age of the breakdown of historic instruments of power. Jill Lepore sums it up in the *New Yorker*: 'But, for genuine illumination about the promise and the limits of constitutionalism, consider, instead, Colley's Rule: Follow the violence'. Not everyone, however, is as committed to Colley's Rule as Lepore. The *London Review of Books* strips war from its assessment of the text's contemporary resonances: 'The book comes at the right moment. Constitutional storms are massing over the old United

Kingdom'. Colley's book and the rule Lepore finds there is too densely specific and too nuanced to be easily applied to today. The constitutions about which she writes are so varied, they appear in so many places, and so many different kinds of people—reformers, reactionaries, revolutionaries—write them that easy traffic between then and now, the past and today, is inadvisable. Even so, the clarity, simplicity and strength of her argument exert their own force; the temptation is to map yesterday on to today. My own reading of Colley suggests that using her framework in today's context means considering the drafting, revising and doing away with constitutions around the world as responses to political upheavals wrought by an age of ongoing and ever-developing warfare. 

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Richard de Ritter, *Imagining Women Readers, 1789–1820: Well-Regulated Minds* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 240pp. ISBN 978-0-7190-9033-2; £80 (hb).

THE SUBTITLE OF RICHARD DE RITTER'S STUDY of women readers, 'well-regulated minds', is drawn from Priscilla Wakefield's *Mental Improvement* (1798), a set of educational dialogues that range across a striking range of topics: from whaling and fisheries, to the uses of trees and metals, and the production of salt, sugar, wool and glass. Mrs Harcourt, one of Wakefield's educational parents, states that 'a well regulated mind is marked by the judicious disposal of time, converting even amusement into instruction' (qtd on p. 8). The relationship between amusement and instruction—between what it means to read at surface-level and deeply; or between reading for pleasure and for moral improvement—is at the centre of de Ritter's study of 'the place of the female reader in British culture between 1789 and 1820' (p. 1). Exploring cultural representations of reading by Anna Lætitia Barbauld, Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Hamilton, Mary Hays, Hannah More, Charlotte Smith, Jane West, Wakefield, Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen, the book is a welcome addition to existing scholarly work on women's reading, building most of all on Jacqueline Pearson's landmark study, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750–1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (1999). Drawing on previous work on women's lives by Angela Keane, Nancy Armstrong, Harriet Guest and others, De Ritter's main concern is to challenge previous accounts of reading as a predominantly private, domestic activity for women; rather, as 'a form of symbolic labour [...] conceptualised through the discourses of work and professional specialisation',