



Caudillos Versus the Nation State

2

1841–1845	1846–1848	1845	1851–1859	1879–1883
Ramón Castilla rules Peru. He returned to power 1855–1862	Mexican-American War	Domingo Faustino Sarmiento publishes <i>Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism</i>	José María Urbina is president of Ecuador	War of the Pacific between Peru, Bolivia, and Chile

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For the rare visitor who wanders through the Museum of the Illinois National Guard in Springfield, the oddest part of the adventure comes when they encounter the regiment's most famous trophy, a wooden leg encased in glass, which once belonged to General Antonio López de Santa Anna (Figure 2.1). It seems that in 1847 a group of Illinois National Guardsmen took it from the eleven-time Mexican president as he was eating his lunch during a lull in the fighting of what Mexicans refer to as the North American Invasion. Santa Anna removed the leg (his left) so he could eat comfortably, unaware of the Illinoisans lurking in the nearby bushes. Seizing the moment, they pounced and made off with the leg. As far as macabre symbolism goes, it ranks pretty high. American soldiers steal the prosthesis of a Mexican general, making his disability their booty.

Strange though it may seem, this is but one episode from the story of Santa Anna and his leg. This sometime president and sometime rebel marked the history of post-independence Mexico more than any other public figure. He was a hero of independence and the civil strife that followed, and first elected president in 1833 (see Figure 2.2). He lost his actual leg in the Pastry War (so named because one of the grievances that prompted the war was a demand for reparations from a French baker whose shop had been destroyed in a riot) with France in 1838. Initially, the leg was buried on his estate at Manga de Clavo in Veracruz. It was disinterred and given a state funeral in Mexico City in 1842, when Santa Anna was



Figure 2.1 Picture of wooden leg belonging to the Mexican President, General Antonio López de Santa Anna

Source: Reprinted with permission from Dr. Antonio de la Cova

again president. Some years later his political enemies removed the leg from its tomb and dragged it through the streets of the city until it disintegrated.

Told as a sort of tragic comedy, this story often stands in for the larger history of Latin America in the half century after independence. Santa Anna assumed the Mexican presidency eleven times, often for short periods, and typically left office in disgrace. Mexicans nonetheless turned to him time and time again to defend their country or take on its internal enemies, and each time he willingly assumed the role of national savior. He oversaw many national disasters, the loss of Texas (1836), the loss of the Mexican–American War (1846–1848), and ultimately the Gadsden Purchase (1853), when he sold a sliver of Northern Mexico to the United States for \$10 million (a map of these losses can be found in *At a Glance: Political Divisions*, on p¹). This signaled the end for Santa Anna. Driven into exile in 1855, he did not return to Mexico until 1874. He died two years later in relative obscurity.

To the contemporary reader the story of Santa Anna’s leg seems macabre, and slightly disconcerting. It reminds us that, as the novelist Leslie Poles Hartley famously noted, “the past is a foreign country,”¹ that the ways that people made sense of the world in the past were often profoundly different from the way we make sense of the world today, so different as to seem bizarre. To get beyond the farce we need signposts, an explanatory framework that will allow us to make sense of the way that people lived in the past, so that we might treat them as more than simple caricatures. We explain Santa Anna and his leg by reminding ourselves of the deeply Catholic quality of Mexican society during this era. Relics—sometimes simply the hair of a saint, or a drop of Jesus’ blood—played an important



Figure 2.2 Antonio López de Santa Anna

Source: Southern Methodist University, Central University Libraries, DeGolyer Library

role in Mexican Catholicism. Many people invested the relic with a special kind of power, mixing their reverence for the relic with the sense that it (in this case, Santa Anna's leg) embodied the properties of the thing it represented. A cultural practice rooted both in Mexico's pre-Colombian past and to the folk cultures of medieval Europe, this had the capacity to transform Santa Anna's leg into a sacred object, first to be worshiped and then despised.

North of the border, visitors to the Illinois National Guard Museum have the opportunity to see Santa Anna's leg, much like Latin America (and in particular Mexico's North), as a prize, won through American ingenuity. Taken to its extreme, North Americans use the leg to symbolize a region that lacks a capacity to control itself and its own destiny (after all, the Mexican president was too fuzzy-headed to pay attention to his own wooden leg). Mexicans, on the other hand, can view the display as representative of both a national tragedy and a reminder of how cruel their northern neighbors are.

In a global sense, the leg and the man who lost it have the capacity to stand in for something even larger. The fact that he became president so many times, that his leg was bound up in a story that mixed personal charisma with Catholic iconography in what seems like a peculiarly Latin American fashion, and that he oversaw such a series of national disasters, have transformed Santa Anna an icon of the turmoil that engulfed Latin America during the nineteenth century, a period sometimes referred to as the *caudillo* age.

The *Caudillo*

How was it that Santa Anna ruled Mexico eleven times? His story can seem idiosyncratic, about Mexico at a certain time and place, except for the fact that the term we use to describe him—*caudillo*—links him to the type of political leader who dominated the nineteenth-century history of Latin America. *Caudillos* were critical figures in societies torn by conflict, nations where citizens could not turn to civic institutions or processes to defend their interests. They were strongmen, literally, charismatic figures who could defend their interests and the interests of their supporters by unleashing a torrent of violence against their enemies. Inasmuch as *caudillos* oversaw their share of national disasters, they were also formed by those disasters. They were figures who entered the vacuum of power left by the collapse of the Spanish colonial state and who offered hope for stability through the force of their will and their capacity to vanquish their enemies.

Independence in the Americas left the new nations of the region with numerous challenges. Many members of the old political and cultural elites were suddenly unwelcome, viewed as foreigners loyal to an imagined enemy who had not quite given up the dream of re-colonizing their nations. The Catholic Church too was suspect. Long a servant of the colonial state and a possessor of great wealth, it promised stability to some and offered the threat of a return of the Spanish crown to others. More than this, the elites who remained in the former colonies generally took a dim view of the populace, which was generally poor, uneducated, and either indigenous, African, or of mixed racial origin. While Europeans increasingly viewed their nations as folk cultures, united through language, tradition, and blood, Latin American elites did not tend to view their societies in this fashion. In the Americas the ethnic and cultural divides were too vast.

Just as daunting was the task of physically controlling national territories. England, then the emerging great power of Europe, was a tiny country. France was not much larger, and Spain was a country in name only. The United States of America were substantial, but mostly comprised of settlements along the eastern seaboard, easily traversed and relatively unobstructed by geography. Latin Americans faced an entirely different set of challenges. Most Latin American nations were, when first imagined, vast territories. In comparison to their Anglo-American cousins, the colonies had been far flung, often characterized by long distances between mining centers, administrative and commercial capitals, and the ports, all of which were linked by narrow and sometimes impassable trails. Consider a country like Mexico, which spanned from contemporary Oregon to Costa Rica, or the United Provinces of La Plata (modern Argentina), which spanned from the Tierra del Fuego to contemporary Bolivia. Even when these countries were sparsely populated, vast distances and geography put the lie to all illusions of central control.

These territories were linked more loosely under colonial rule than the map of the colonial world suggested. Brazil's vast Amazonian interior remained largely outside the purview of the state. In many regions, colonial officials lived exclusively in cities, towns, and mining camps, relying on a network of indigenous and mixed-raced intermediaries to maintain the façade of colonial rule beyond these locales. In the countryside the colonial state was a shadowy presence, and the illusion of centralized authority collapsed quickly when local interests were threatened. The long history of rebellions in the colonies, in which not just the poor, but sometimes even colonial elites used violence to

defend their autonomy, revealed a state that was weak, and relied more on negotiation than coercion to rule.

The size of the territories and the physical obstacles to travel (mountain ranges, gorges, nearly impassible jungles) produced the logic by which the colonial state functioned. The same would be true for independent nations. Local officials acted mostly autonomously, only loosely controlled from the outside. To this, however, was added a new problem. With the collapse of colonial rule the citizens of the new republics had few compelling reasons to maintain the types of erstwhile loyalty central government that had informed three centuries of colonial rule. Cities and institutions that had once embodied royal authority now symbolized a recently vanquished oppressor, and regional elites did not need to bow down to the centralized authority of the capital. With neither king nor church to justify their position in the nation, the capital cities risked becoming shadows of their former selves.

This again, takes us back to one of the important features of colonial life. The emperor and the Catholic Church played powerful symbolic roles as the social glue of colonial society. The Spanish king did not represent the imposition of foreign authority, but was a paternal mediator who sometimes intervened against a venal local aristocracy. Church and state were consciously positioned this way in the colonies, defending local peoples against their enemies, who were often installed in colonial capitals. The king might intervene in local land or political disputes, might remove corrupt officials, or confer a pardon for crimes committed. Likewise the church played a critical role in ministering to the poor and shaping ceremonial life across the colonies. With these two institutions gone or severely weakened, only the long-standing enemies of local interests were left in their place in the capital cities. The *caudillo* emerged in the midst of this divide.

In some ways *caudillos* provided a link to the colonial past. The types of loyalty they commanded was reminiscent of the devotion once paid to the Spanish crown. *Caudillos* were physically strong, and carried an air of invincibility. They were closely connected to their followers, intervening on their behalf to settle grievances, defending them (as the king had once done) against pernicious outsiders. But the fact that *caudillos* generally relied on narrow regional power-bases also reminds us of the extent to which post-colonial societies were fractured. Regional, class, and ethnic cleavages meant that *caudillos* had to rule through a number of distinct mechanisms. The first was the force of arms, their armies being largely local and tied together by personal connections and fictive kinship. The second was through the creation of informal patronage networks that promoted stability beyond the local level.

These networks functioned through a constant process of negotiation between different regional strongmen, which when successful produced a minimum level of political peace and the appearance of functioning states. Rooted in convenience and personal relationships instead of common ideological commitments, these pacts were always in danger of collapsing as new internal and external threats emerged. These were therefore governments characterized by the absence of powerful or relatively autonomous bureaucracies, of regularly occurring elections, or of the markers of a robust civil society (independent newspapers, political parties, and the like). Perhaps best described as weak states, the governments ensconced in the capital cities lacked the power to enforce laws, collect taxes, or impose their will outside of regions militarily controlled by the ruling *caudillo*.

The Mexican case is poignant, as a nation in turmoil lost half its territory to the ascendant United States, and at other times saw secession in the south (Central America in 1823, which in turn dissolved in 1838), but perhaps the most powerful example of the dissolution produced through *caudillismo* comes from the Andes. At independence, Chile was a relatively peripheral nation in the region, while Peru and Bolivia represented two of the crown jewels of the Spanish Empire. Nonetheless, in the aftermath of independence Chilean elites bound themselves together to produce a stable oligarchy² empowered by revenues from mining exports, a formidable merchant marine, and a state that was capable of investing in economic development. Though Chile was hardly democratic (civil society was dominated by the church and military, and most land in the country remained locked in a semi-feudal system characterized by huge agricultural estates known as *latifundio*), the Chilean state had the resources to invest in education, a modern military, and public services.

Chile was well situated to gain control of the nitrate deposits of the northern Atacama Desert, which became increasingly valuable as fertilizer by the 1870s. Though many of the deposits were on Bolivian soil, Chilean and British companies were better situated to exploit them than the Bolivians, and gained concessions to work these deposits in the 1870s. When the Bolivian government decided to raise the taxes charged in these concessions in 1878, Chilean merchants protested that these increases were illegal, and the conflict quickly spiraled into a much more serious dispute over the border. Bolivia declared war on Chile in February 1879, pulling Peru into the conflict because of a secret treaty between the two countries. In the war a relatively small and previously poor country took on two much larger neighbors, and defeated both conclusively.

The figure of the *caudillo* looms large over both Bolivia's and Peru's disasters in the war. Bolivian elites did not manage to consolidate under a stable national state after independence. Over time, peace between the cities and the countryside was maintained only through the Andean Pact, in which indigenous *ayllus* (clans) essentially acted as independent states, paying tribute to the Bolivian government in return for autonomy. This left a series of *caudillos* in control of an extremely weak central state, unable to build a modern infrastructure, develop the national economy, or create a modern military. Peru's story was even more desultory. After banning Indian tribute in the country's first constitution, Peruvian elites rapidly retreated from their image of a modern nation. An impoverished Peruvian state reinstated tribute as early as 1826, and even when the country experienced a boom in *guano* (bird or bat droppings, used to make fertilizer) exports in the 1840s, most of the revenues from *guano* were lost to ill-considered development efforts, civil war, and graft. In spite of his country's export boom, Peru's dominant *caudillo* of the era, Ramón Castilla, who ruled 1845–1851 and 1855–1862, left behind an empty treasury and growing foreign debt. When Chile invaded, Peruvians had little capacity to mount a spirited resistance, a problem made worse by the fact that Andean elites refused to arm Andean peasants, for fear that the arms might be ultimately turned on them. Peru lost territory and the lingering traces of parochial pride that came from its place in history. Bolivia lost its only access to the sea, a blow that is a source of bitterness to this day. What is more, the weakness of the Bolivian state would lead to further territorial losses in conflicts with Brazil and Paraguay in the decades to follow. By the mid-twentieth century and *caudillo* politics ultimately resulted in the loss of half of the national territory (see Figure 2.3).

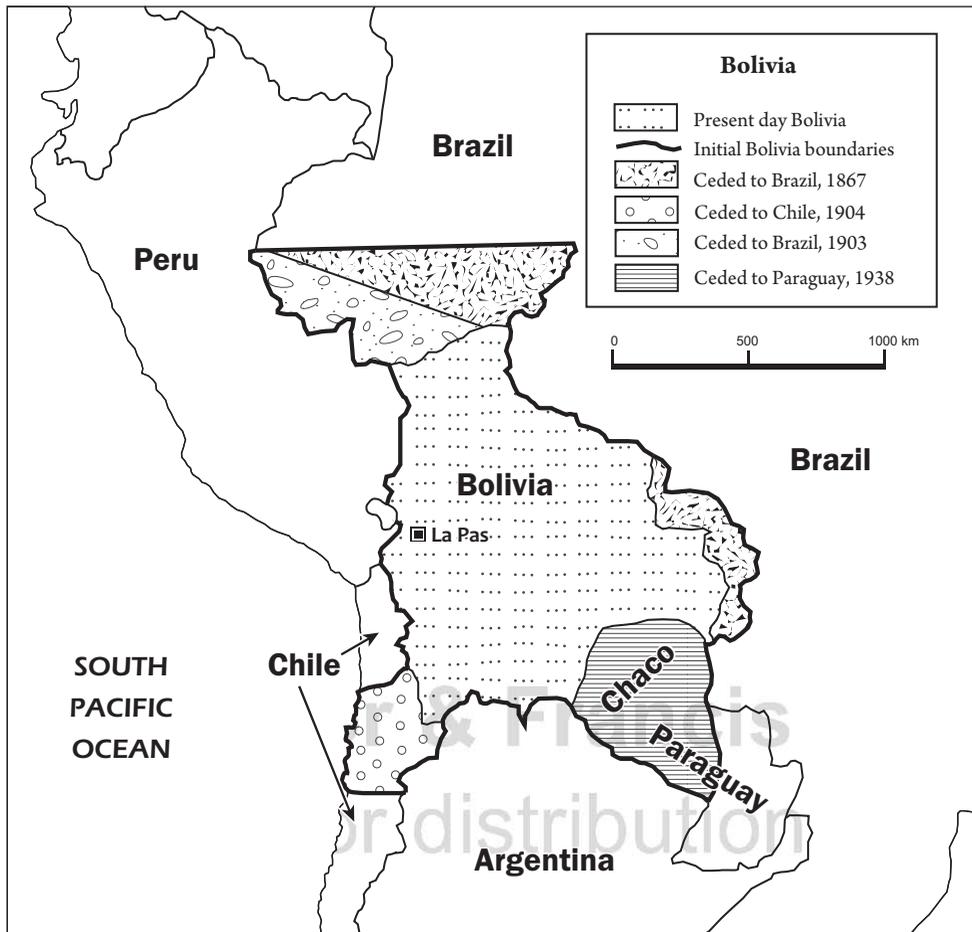


Figure 2.3 Bolivia's territorial losses, 1867–1938

The Cause of All National Disasters?

It is difficult to tell these histories without rendering the *caudillo* age as a story of national disasters. The internal violence, economic catastrophes, and territorial losses seem to bear this view out. Were these not somehow terror states, where people lived in fear of the dictator and civil rights were non-existent? Did this era not also signal an exodus of foreign and domestic capital from the region, and little economic growth or development, because investors avoided putting their money into zones characterized by civil war? There are reasons to answer all these questions in the affirmative, especially if we take Santa Anna and Castilla as the archetypal *caudillo*. It becomes more difficult to do this confidently if we look at others who just as easily lay claim to the moniker, or look more deeply into the larger social phenomena that characterized the *caudillo* age, and the ways that the emergence of *caudillos* spoke to the nature of daily life in the early nineteenth century.

We might begin to understand the *caudillo's* capacity to command loyalty by imagining the sorts of social and political attachments that that characterized Latin American

societies in this era. People in the region tended to organize their lives around enduring familial, religious, and political loyalties, and though these loyalties often seemed to link one community to the next through ritual, practice, and shared symbols, for the most part those loyalties were in fact intensely local. While it is true that colonial elites imagined attachments that transcended the colonies, connecting them to Europe and the Spanish Empire more generally, and even the lower castes revered the king, in practice most people in the region tended to be deeply parochial, to cultivate loyalties first and foremost to their home community and real or fictive kin. In the colonial system the town council (*cabildo*) was one of the few political bodies that could represent local people against the state and more powerful economic interests, and as such was one of the most important components of associational life. What is more, local networks were incredibly effective at limiting the power of the central state, as the bosses (sometimes called *caciques*) simply refused to implement the rulings of their colonial overlords when they determined that it was importune to do so (thus, the famous colonial idiom, “I obey, but do not comply”).

Local attachments were not simply a matter of taste. For residents of poor communities and local elites alike, unity on the local level had always been a strong bulwark against sinister external forces. Indigenous peoples in particular were given a great deal of power at the local level under the colonial system, an autonomy that was mostly exercised through the privileges assigned to local indigenous authorities by the colonial state. Village autonomy was often justified as a defense of *usos y costumbres* (customary law), a concept that suggested that indigenous villages represented cultures that were distinct from the societies around them, a Republic of Indians distinct from the Republic of Spaniards.

Indigenous in this usage was more of a spatial than a racial moniker. By the nineteenth century most of the people with indigenous ancestry in Latin America did not live as Indians per se, but as miners, porters, muleteers, agricultural workers, and as part of vast and growing urban underclasses. They spoke Spanish and wore clothing that gave no sign of their ethnic origins. They did not generally think of themselves as Indians, but as Mexicans, Peruvians, Chileans, etc. They also had relatively little invested in the struggles of their rural brethren to defend the spaces—the communities, their adjacent land, timber, and water—that made one Indian. “Indian,” in this sense, was not a broad category, easily mobilized in the way that “Catholic,” or “Mexican” might be. It spoke to a very specific place, a history in that place, and a series of linguistic, religious, political, and social practices that rooted given individuals in those places, and that local elites carefully reproduced in order to maintain a clear sense of “us” and “them.” The leaders of indigenous communities (which in turn, were not generally identified as Indian, but by the specific ethnic group to which members of a community belonged) were inclined to make alliances with outsiders mainly based on their sense that those alliances would work in defense of their communities.

The same could be said more broadly for peasant communities across Latin America, where the defense of local customs and life-ways had long been bound up with other strategies for personal and community survival. Former slaves in Surinam (the Saramakas), Spanish-speaking, Catholic peasants in the Andes, cowboys in Argentina (*gauchos*), and *mestizo*³ ranchers in Mexico (*rancheros*) all sought to defend their communities from the depredations of outsiders during the years following independence. All defined themselves as not quite white, not quite European, and believed that the things that made them particular were also qualities that they had a right to defend, by force of arms if necessary.

Peasants and Indians depended on powerful interlocutors (first the king, later the *caudillo*) to defend their interests in the face of attacks on village autonomy and communal landholding even in the late colonial period. Committed to a variety of forms of modernization, the emerging liberal⁴ elites in the region viewed peasant communal lands and autonomy as the essence of backwardness, signs of nations that lacked a coherent form, and of property regimes that stifled productivity because communal villagers could not profit individually from their toil. Villagers, on the other hand, believed that these traditions were essential to their survival. They acted as barriers to *hacendados*⁵ and others who coveted their lands by making those lands inalienable and by establishing mechanisms whereby the poor could demand more land. They depended on the practices whereby the colonial state and later the *caudillos* periodically granted lands to the rural poor as a reward for military service, or in response to claims that a village's current boundaries could not support its population.

Independence disrupted the political and social order, and the civil wars that followed devastated the export sectors that had prospered under colonial rule. In much of the region the mines and plantations went into prolonged declines, impoverishing some elites and making it more difficult for them to maintain the labor regimes of the past. In this context poor rural people often found that they were able to live and work under conditions that were more equitable than in the past. Peasants across the region faced less pressure from expanding commercial agriculture. Demands for forced labor declined because of the shuttering of mines and plantations. And states that were weaker than ever before were less able to tax and draft their citizens into service. As in the past, economic decline on the macro level left many poor people with more control over their own destinies, better able to use their own labor power for themselves, and more likely to be able to negotiate the terms of their participation in political and military movements. Strong liberal states might have appropriated peasant and indigenous resources in order to promote national economic growth and development. In the absence of such states, many rural communities flourished, promising their loyalty to individuals who promised to defend them against their liberal enemies in the capital cities.

It was this milieu that produced the *caudillo*. Drawing their power from shifting personal networks, and needing to attend to the demands of these clients, *caudillos* were anathema to the project of the modern state, which seeks to create systems, institutions and practices that exist independent of the individuals who operate the levers of power. Unlike a strong central state, which might draw on the resources of the entire nation (or colony) to make demands of poor peasant villagers, a *caudillo* could only command loyalty from his soldiers if he delivered the goods. This was a tragedy to those liberals who saw in Latin America a series of unrealized potentials, the urban and economic elites who wanted to harness the productive capacity of the mines and plantations for national progress and their own benefit, and a respite for those who felt in the pressures of modernity something that would destroy their way of life.

Rafael Carrera, the nineteenth-century Guatemalan *caudillo* who was widely hated by Central American elites, was extremely popular among indigenous peoples precisely because he stood between Guatemala's liberal elites and the rural poor, stifling the growth of the central state and defending rural autonomy. It should be unsurprising that he drew most of his soldiers from the rural poor. In this he was similar to José María Urvina (president of Ecuador from 1851 to 1859), who leveraged the deep inequalities in Ecuador to his

advantage. Both leaders acted as interlocutors between marginalized peoples and more powerful groups (often the state, foreign interests, or national elites). Their power came both from their ability to oversee large-scale patronage systems, distributing political spoils to their supporters (this is often called clientelism), and from their ability to cultivate a sense of closeness, of fictive kinship (known here as *compadrazgo*) in their followers because of their brotherly or fatherly concern for them. They did so by conjuring the same sentiments that had long kept the Spanish king relevant in the colonies. He was the ultimate defender of the rights and interests of the poor, and especially Indians. This pact was in part acted out through elaborate symbolic acts, but it was also acted out through concrete acts, land grants, intercessions between local elites and indigenous peoples, and acts of clemency for crimes committed against the state. In societies characterized by deep inequalities, rigid hierarchies, and enormous antipathies, the king, and later the *caudillo*, acted as a mediator.

Caudillos occupied contradictory roles in this conflict. Urquina, for example, won indigenous allies by attacking their traditional exploiters, the Catholic Church and the landlords of the highlands (on whose estates Indians lived in semi-serfdom). He eliminated the tribute that Indians had been forced to pay and banned the widely-despised Indian Protectorate.⁶ As a liberal however, Urquina supported the parcelization of indigenous lands, a reform that would cause indigenous villages to lose much of their land. On top of this, his efforts to undermine the power of highland landlords had the effect of freeing up Indian laborers for service on the cacao estates on the coast (which suffered severe labor shortages). Former serfs from the highlands often found themselves toiling in conditions on the coast that were even worse than what they had experienced previously.

Perhaps no one better exemplified these sorts of compromises between defending a constituency and supporting economic development than the Argentine *caudillo* Juan Manuel de Rosas (see Figure 2.4). The model for the barbaric *caudillo* in Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's classic *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism*,⁷ Rosas was in many ways an archetypical *caudillo*. Born to a wealthy landowning family, he made his name as a military man in the wars of independence. He became governor of the Province of Buenos Aires in 1829, a position he would hold with only brief absences until he was overthrown in 1852. As governor He positioned himself as the defender of order, a warrior for traditional values, and nurtured a personality cult around his Holy Federation that placed him at the symbolic center of the nation in ways that were not unlike the role assigned to the Spanish king in earlier times. Followers assiduously placed his portrait in their homes, and wore the red of the Holy Federation as much to deny disloyalty as to prove loyalty. In return for giving up any pretense to civil rights, they received the economic spoils and personal security gained from order; an order which was situated as the antidote to the violence and dislocation produced in the wars of independence.

Rosas' reign was brutal. Enemies were shown no mercy, and his opponents lived in fear of his personal army, the *mazorca*. Like other *caudillos*, when he assumed the governorship he confiscated the property of his enemies and used it to pay his soldiers and provide recompense to the poor peons who had suffered losses in earlier conflicts. Rosas paid particular attention to Afro-Argentines, as they represented around 30 percent of the population of Buenos Aires and formed much of his political base. His *Gaceta Mercantil* called them "valiant defenders of liberty," and declared that "General Rosas so appreciates the mulattos and *morenos* that he has no objection to seating them at his table and eating with



Figure 2.4 Juan Manuel de Rosas

Source: Portrait by Cayetano Descalzi, Museo histórico nacional, Buenos Aires, Argentina

them.”⁸ Rosas’ enemies among the Unitarians (including Esteban Echeverría) recoiled at these images, as they represented a direct repudiation of the deeply racist values that predominated among elites of the day. His supporters however, reveled in these performances of loyalty to his followers.

Traditional assessments of Rosas held that the terror of these years somehow precluded the creation of a nation. These judgments were originally penned by Argentines themselves, most notably Sarmiento. Rosas came to represent a kind of rural backwardness, whether cultural or racial, a kind of degeneration that prevented the advance of civilization. However, in recent decades a more complex narrative has emerged. Revisionist histories begin by acknowledging that in the aftermath of Argentine independence, the odds were stacked against anyone who might aspire to rule this vast region through a strong centralized state. In the 1820s Bernardino Rivadavia tried to expand federal control and create a balanced economy with a powerful centralized and efficient state, but his efforts were undermined by recurring civil war. Not only were distances great and hard to travel, the regional strongmen who emerged during the wars for independence possessed their own armies, and were unlikely to cede authority to Buenos Aires. At this moment the complete dissolution of Argentina was possible, as Bolivia’s, Paraguay’s, and Uruguay’s secessions revealed. Facing these facts on the ground, Rosas wove together a loose coalition of *caudillos*. Each *caudillo* was essentially autonomous, but all were expected to swear loyalty to the Holy Federation. In return for their autonomy, they recognized Buenos Aires’ right to control foreign policy and ceded any interest in foreign trade to *porteño*⁹ merchants. Rosas’ position in turn allowed him to use the National Customs House to raise revenue.

Starting from this position of relative weakness, Rosas used customs revenues to gradually expand the authority of Buenos Aires across the national territory, bringing the other

caudillos increasingly under the central state's authority. He never produced the strong centralized state that Unitarians wanted, but the alliances and agreements he oversaw maintained the peace and allowed the early development of Argentina's agricultural export economy, especially beef and hides (with some wheat). Under Rosas, the patterns of land tenure and oligarchical rule that would later characterize the country's export boom were established. The state and private interests built roads, transportation and communications networks, and the transformation of the pampas from free range into private property gradually proceeded. Domination of the export sector also allowed Buenos Aires merchants make vast fortunes by exporting salted beef to feed slaves in Brazil and Cuba. Without Rosas' particular style of rule, much of this may have been impossible. Whether that is a good thing or a bad thing depends on one's perspective.

Over time, Rosas' enemies grew in number, but until the very end Rosas had considerable support from *estancieros*¹⁰ in Buenos Aires, the Catholic Church, and the poor. In part this support was strategic, followers followed because it was the safest thing to do, but his broad appeal should not be underestimated. He defended religious tradition and placed Catholicism at the center of his symbolic repertoire, which stood in stark contrast to his liberal enemies. He spoke a language that resonated with the rural and urban poor, showing them that he was one of them. And he always divvied up the spoils of power among his followers. The combination of these factors allowed him to be one of the most important *caudillos* in the history of Latin America.

Ending the *Caudillo* Age?

Did Argentina's *caudillo* age end with the overthrow of Rosas in 1852 and the gradual creation of a more republican system of government? Did Mexico's end with the exile of Santa Anna? These questions are extremely difficult to answer, as the political style of *caudillismo*, of strong charismatic leaders with military backgrounds, would persist long after the fratricidal violence and instability of the mid-century receded. Rosas' successors focused on building formal institutions of government, on creating national economic and educational policies, on creating a state that ruled as much through a judicial and political system as it did through the force of arms. And yet the threat of violence (along with actual violence) remained a necessary part of Argentine statecraft long after Rosas was cold in his grave. Across the region it would be very difficult to effectively separate the state from the ruler, to produce societies in which government was a series of institutions that in some ways operated autonomously from the person who, at any given moment, occupied the presidential chair.

We see this challenge quite starkly in Mexico's *Reforma*, a period that lasted roughly from 1854 until 1876. The collapse of Santa Anna's last regime emboldened a generation of young liberals, led by the likes of Benito Juárez and the Lerdo de Tejada brothers (Miguel and Sebastián), many of them young lawyers with a radically liberal democratic bent. These reformers rapidly pushed through a series of major legal reforms that they then enshrined in the 1857 Constitution. Among the most controversial reforms were those that eliminated the corporate rights and privileges (*fueros*) of the military, the church, economic guilds, and Indian communities. Liberals viewed these as vestiges of colonial rule that undermined the capacity of the state to collect taxes and retarded economic growth

(as only a small amount of land circulated in the market, leaving much of the country tied up in what they viewed as unproductive estates). The church was predictably opposed, as were those elites who had enjoyed these privileges. The opposition also included the residents of many indigenous communities (*ejidos*), who could no longer hold land collectively and who feared that privatization of their lands (the requirement that land be held by private individuals) would inevitably mean that poor indigenous peasants would lose their land to rich outsiders.

Mexican conservatives went to war against the new order in 1857, recruiting many of their foot soldiers from within indigenous communities on the promise that they would restore the colonial order. Conservatives also promised to implement a head tax (*capacitación*) that would provide exemptions from military service and sales taxes for residents of indigenous communities. Nonetheless, even with these commitments, not all indigenous communities supported the conservatives. Mid-century Mexican liberalism found adherents among some indigenous Mexicans, particularly because of its inclusivity (its promise to offer equal rights to all Mexicans) and its promise of democratic freedoms, which in many cases was taken to mean the right of indigenous communities to establish their own rules and practices, an interpretation that Mexican liberals were in no condition to contest at this point.¹¹ Mexican liberalism in its most radical forms called for the devolution of political authority to the local level, a promise that was likewise appealing in indigenous communities. Furthermore, when Mexican conservatives, having lost the battle on the ground, went so far as to invite a foreign despot to rule Mexico in 1861 (the Austrian Prince Maximilian), significant numbers of indigenous Mexicans lined up to defend the patria against a foreign invader.

That indigenous Mexicans lined up behind conservative and liberal causes, and sometimes both in short order, reminds us that this was an era in which popular sectors had a great deal of room to maneuver when it came to their relationships with elites. Residents of indigenous communities might support a conservative leader because of their promise to defend communal rights, or a liberal leader because of their appeal to democratic rights and defense of the nation; what mattered most of all was the content of the shifting bargains through which indigenous communities endeavored to defend a series of interests against outsiders—some national, some foreign. These arrangements were invariably informed by a sense of urgency. Liberal and conservative elites relied on militias drawn from the rural poor to fight their battles, and indigenous communities needed relationships with powerful outsiders in order to reduce their vulnerability. What the *caudillo* age offered then was moment when a variety of popular and elite projects might intersect, and where there seemed to be opportunities for marginalized groups to negotiate the terms of their inclusion in the national project through military service.

This did not mean that peasant and indigenous groups could invariably or permanently leverage their military capacities into partnerships with elites. It was, in fact, the potential power of these subaltern groups that prompted Peruvian elites to spurn their assistance during the Chilean invasion in 1881, fearful as they were of the capacity of Andean peasants to threaten their own power (they preferred Chilean overlords to the specter of Túpac Amaru). And in Mexico, as central state authority expanded under Porfirio Díaz after 1876, the alliances that had made Díaz a powerful *caudillo* during and after the French Intervention

were no longer necessary, as indigenous and peasant supporters were supplanted by a modern army, a modern state, and technologies (railroads, telegraphs, machine guns) that facilitated the concentration of power. No longer needing the support of his indigenous allies as Mexico left the *caudillo* era behind, in the 1870s and 1880s Díaz passed a series of laws that designated indigenous lands as *terrenos baldios* (vacant lands), facilitating their transfer to private ownership. The government allowed private land survey companies to establish the physical coordinates of these lands in return for the right to keep one-third of the land surveyed. Indian communities were in theory entitled to turn their *ejidos* into private property, but many resisted and had their lands expropriated by the stroke of a pen. Others found that the interlocutors with whom they worked misrepresented the deeds and other papers that community leaders signed, resulting in significant losses. Within a half century nearly 90 percent of the land in the country fell into the hands of less than 1 percent of the population.

Díaz the *caudillo* was a far better ally to these communities than Díaz the victorious liberal. In his former self he depended on the military capacity of these communities because of his relative weakness, and tended to reward their loyalty with his. As a *caudillo* Díaz was less concerned with ideology than cultivating a network that could place him in the presidential palace, and correspondingly less concerned with extending the power of the government into peasant communities in the interest of national integration and development. The appeal of *caudillos* like Díaz to these communities was inextricably tied up with this fact, that in return for loyalty he respected village autonomy (at least he did so early on). And that respect was not simply evidenced through a tendency not to meddle, it was demonstrated in the respect that the most successful *caudillos* showed to the poor, indigenous, and *casta*¹² followers who made up their armies. With the emergence of a stronger state, comprised of armies and institutions that could effectively extend the power of that state throughout the national territory, that bond was broken.

The Document: Literature as History

When Latin Americans looked for a language to describe the anxieties they felt about their societies during the nineteenth century, the images they turned to were often rooted in a very specific binary—the struggle between barbarism and civilization. One was rooted in the past, the other oriented to the future. One held the promise of modern nationhood, the other poverty and dependence. Race, class, gender, and culture were all described through these lenses, producing clear visions of who promised to be enlightened citizens, and who were drags on progress. At their most extreme, the modernizers sought to remake their societies into American copies of Europe, transforming their cities to mimic the latest European architectural styles, importing fashions and trends from the old world, and sending their children to European finishing schools so that they might be even more civilized than the civilized.

Not everyone agreed that this was the best course for the future. Just as the rural and urban poor often carried on their own traditions alongside the elites, sometimes expressing their opposition to elite domination through popular culture, there were many in the intelligentsia who recoiled at the idea of Latin America as a European copy. Many nationalists

saw in the region's popular cultures the traditions that gave the Latin America its form and specificity, even if they also wanted to embed those practices within modern nations. They did not want civilization to flatten out those things that made one an Argentine, a Brazilian, a Mexican, a Chilean.

Over many decades literature became one of the critical forums in which this interplay of local and universal values was dissected. Below (Document 2.1) we present one of the brilliant early examples of this tradition. *The Slaughterhouse (El Matadero)*, written by the Argentine Esteban Echeverría in 1838, is not a screed against either the traditional or the modern, but is instead a deeply ambivalent story of change. Like other notable writers of his day, Echeverría imagined himself as a nationalist and a political activist. He was a prominent member of several political clubs founded to oppose Rosas in the 1830s, including the *Asociación de Mayo*, named for Argentina's independence heroes. He used fiction to articulate a vision of the nation as it was and how it should be, and in many ways lived the tragedies he described through the experience of forced exile. It was in exile in Uruguay that he wrote this powerful indictment of Rosas, and where he died while Rosas was still in power. *The Slaughterhouse* would not be published until 1871.

Echeverría's anxieties about barbarism were also evident in his other work, especially *la insurrección del sur* and *la cautiva*, his epic poem about a European woman kidnapped by Mapuche Indians. In this, he was very much like other liberal intellectuals of his day. Strong opponents of dictatorship and *caudillismo*, these figures are in some ways sympathetic, yet they situate their opposition to dictatorship in ways that remind us of the elitism of the era. Theirs was an urbane intellectual liberalism, with little sympathy for the sensibilities and capacities of the rural folk who formed the backbone of the Rosas regime. And in the end, their admiration of civilization would have its genocidal variant, as the logics of modernity under-girded decisions to eliminate those who were unwilling or unable to embrace modern liberal sensibilities.

Other important texts in this literary cannon include *Facundo*, *Martín Fierro*, *Rebellion in the Backlands*, *Don Diego Sombra*, and *Birds Without a Nest*. Some of these are more sympathetic to the backwards folk than others, situating them as the true nationalists in contrast to the morally bankrupt city-folk. Others see rural backwardness as both the characteristic that gives the nation its form and the nation's undoing. All agree however, that the great struggle that confronts Latin America is the battle between civilization (read Europe) and backwardness (read the dark skinned people of countryside). Almost invariably cast in racial terms, this precluded any possibility that the new republics would embrace horizontal, fraternal forms of citizenship.

Document 2.1 Esteban Echeverría, *The Slaughterhouse (El Matadero)*

Source: Trans. Elizabeth Medina, with assistance from Marina Soldati; <http://www.biblioteca.clarin.com/pbda/cuentos/matadero/matadero.htm>.

Even though what I am about to tell is essentially history, I will not begin with Noah's Ark and his ancestors' genealogy, as the early Spanish chroniclers of the New World were

wont to do and whose example we should emulate. I have many reasons for not following their example, reasons I will not elaborate on in order to avoid long-windedness. I will merely say that the events in my narration took place in the 1830s of the Christian era. It was, moreover, during Lent, a time of year when meat is scarce in Buenos Aires because the Church, in deference to Epictetus's precept of *sustine et abstine*—to bear and forbear—ordains that vigil and abstinence be imposed on the stomachs of the faithful as the flesh is sinful, and thus, as the proverb says: *flesh seeks flesh*. And since the Church, *ab initio* and by direct authorization from God Himself, holds material power over the consciences and stomachs that do not, in any way whatsoever, belong to the individual, then nothing more is fair or rational than for it to forbid what is evil.

The purveyors of meat, on the other hand—good Federalists all, and therefore good Catholics—knowing full well that the people of Buenos Aires possess the precious quality of an extraordinary docility for bowing to any kind of command, bring only the number of steers strictly necessary during the Lenten season to feed the children and the sick—who are excused from the abstinence mandated by the Papal Bull—and without any intention of letting a few intractable heretics stuff their gullets. For there is never any lack of such people, ever prepared to transgress the Church's meat commandments and spread the contagion of their bad example to society.

Thus, it happened that in those days, there was a very heavy rainfall. Roads were flooded. Marshes became lakes, and the streets that led into and out of the city overflowed with slushy mud. A huge torrent suddenly cascaded down Barracas Creek and majestically spread its murky waters until they reached the gully beds of Alto. The Río de la Plata swelled fiercely, propelling the turgid waters that were searching for a channel, making them rush over fields, embankments, groves, and hamlets, until they spread out like a vast lake across all the lowlands. Ringed from north to west by a swath of water and mud, and south by a whitish ocean on whose surface a number of small boats bobbed precariously about, and chimneys and treetops marked with black smudges, the city gazed at the horizon in astonishment from its towers and its ravines, as though imploring for protection from the Most High. The rain seemed to portend another Great Flood. Pious men and women wailed as they prayed novenas and recited endless litanies. Preachers stormed the churches and made the pulpits creak under their hammering fists. "This is Judgment Day," they said. "The end of the world is near. God's wrath is overflowing and spilling forth as floodwaters. Woe unto you, sinners! Woe unto you, wicked Unitarians¹³ who mock the Church and its wise men, and fail to listen reverentially to the word of the Lord's anointed! Woe unto you who do not beg for God's mercy before the altars! The terrible hour approaches of useless gnashing of teeth and feverish cursing. Your wickedness, heresies, blasphemies, your horrendous crimes have caused the plagues of the Lord to veer towards our land. The Lord of the Federation's just hand will damn you."

The wretched women streamed out of the churches, overwhelmed and gasping for air, blaming the calamity, as was to be expected, on the Unitarians.

Still the heavy rains continued falling relentlessly and the flooding worsened, as if to confirm the preachers' predictions. Church bells began tolling, invoking divine aid, on the orders of the very Catholic and universalist Restorer,¹⁴ who it seemed was rather worried. The libertines, the unbelievers—that is to say, the Unitarians—grew fearful at

the sight of so many remorseful faces and at the sound of such a bedlam of profanity. There was already talk, as though the matter had been decided, of a procession that all the people would be obliged to attend, unshod and bareheaded, accompanying the Sacred Host to be carried by the Bishop beneath a canopy, to Balcarce Gully. There, thousands of voices would have to implore for divine mercy, exorcising the cause of the flood—the Unitarian devil.

Happily—or better said, unfortunately, for it would have been a sight to behold—the ceremony was not performed because as the Río de la Plata's floodwaters abated, the immense flood bed gradually drained away without any need of exorcism or supplications.

Now the most relevant circumstance for my story is that as a result of the flood, the Convalecencia Slaughter Yard saw not a single head of cattle for fifteen days, and in one or two days all of the farmers' and water sellers' oxen had been consumed in order to supply the city with beef. The poor children and the sick were fed on eggs and chicken, and the gringos¹⁵ and renegade heretics bellowed for beefsteak and roast. Abstinence from meat was widespread among the common folk, who were blessed as never before by the Church, and thus millions upon millions of plenary indulgences showered down on them. The price of a hen rose to six pesos while eggs went for four *reales* each, and fish was exorbitantly expensive. In those Lenten days, people did not consume fish and red meat in the same meal, nor indulge in gluttonous excess; but, on the other hand, innumerable souls rose straight to heaven and events took place that seemed the stuff of dreams.

Not a single live mouse was left in the slaughter yard, out of the thousands that had found shelter there before. They all died, either from starvation or from drowning in their burrows because of the incessant rain.

Swarms of black women, scavenging in the manner of *caranchos*¹⁶ for viscera to steal, spread throughout the city like mythical harpies, ready to devour anything edible they could find. Their inseparable rivals in the slaughter yard, the seagulls and the dogs, migrated elsewhere in search of animal feed. A number of ailing elderly people contracted consumption for lack of nutritious broth. But the most striking event of all was the near-sudden death of some gringo heretics, who committed the transgression of gorging on Extremadura sausages, ham, and cod, and departed for the afterlife to atone for such an abominable sin as to partake of meat and fish in the same meal.

Some physicians expressed their opinion that if the scarcity of meat continued, then half of the population would suffer from fainting spells because their stomachs were so habituated to the fortifying juices of meat. One could not help noticing the stark contrast between these dire scientific predictions and the condemnations hurled down by the reverend fathers from the pulpits, against all carniferous nutriments and the combined consumption of meat and fish during those days, set aside by the Church for fasting and penance. This set off a kind of internecine warring between stomachs and con- sciences, stoked on one hand by unrelenting appetite, and on the other by the priests' no-less-implacable vociferations, duty bound as they are to brook no vice that might lead to a relaxing of Catholic customs. On top of this, there was the inhabitants' condition of intestinal flatulence from eating fish and beans and other somewhat indigestible fare.

This war was manifested by the jarring sobs and cries that were heard as the priests delivered their sermons, and in the rumblings and sudden explosive noises coming from the city's houses and streets, or wherever people gathered together. The Restorer's government—as paternal as it was far-sighted—grew rather alarmed. Believing that these instances of unrest were instigated by revolutionaries, and attributing them to the savage Unitarians themselves (whose wickedness, said the Federalist preachers, had brought down the flood of God's wrath upon the nation), the government took active measures. It sent out its spies among the populace, and finally, well apprized, issued a decree that was soothing for consciences as well as for stomachs, with a most wise and pious declaration, so that—at all costs and charging across high water if need be—cattle should be brought to the corrals.

And indeed, on the sixteenth day of the scarcity, on the eve of the Day of Sorrows,¹⁷ a troop of fifty fattened steers waded across Paso de Burgos and entered the Alto Slaughter Yard. This number, incidentally, was a mere trifle, given that the population was accustomed to consuming 250 to 300 steers a day and at least a third of the inhabitants were under a special dispensation from the Church allowing them to eat meat. How strange that there should be stomachs subject to inviolable laws and that the Church holds the key to all stomachs!

But there really isn't anything strange about it at all, since the Devil customarily enters the body through the flesh, and the Church has the power to cast him out. It is a matter of reducing man to a machine, whose driving force is not his own will but that of the Church and the government. A time may come when it will be forbidden to breathe fresh air, take a walk, or even to have a conversation with a friend, without first obtaining permission from the competent authorities. This was how it was, more or less, in the happy times of our pious grandparents, which the May Revolution unfortunately disrupted.

In any event, upon the announcement of the government decree, the corrals of Alto filled up—despite all the mud—with butchers, scavengers for viscera, and curious onlookers, all of whom welcomed the fifty steers headed for the slaughter yard with boisterous shouts and applause.

"Smallish, but fat!" they exclaimed. "Long Live the Federation! Long Live the Restorer!"

My readers surely must know that in those days, the Federation was everywhere—even amidst the filth of the slaughterhouse—and just as there could be no sermon without St. Augustine, there was no festival without the Restorer. It is said that when they heard the wild shouting, the last of the rats that were starving to death in their rat holes sprang back to life and began madly scurrying about, for they realized that the familiar merriment and uproar were announcing the return of abundance.

The first steer butchered was gifted whole to the Restorer, who was known for his penchant for grilled meat. A committee of butchers marched off to deliver it in the name of the Federalists of the Alto Slaughter Yard, and they personally expressed their gratitude for the government's wise providence, their unlimited support for the Restorer, and their deep hatred of the enemies of God and man—the Unitarian savages. The Restorer responded to their harangue in the same vein, and the ceremony ended with the appropriate cheers and vociferations from spectators and actors. One

must assume that the Bishop had granted the Restorer a special dispensation to eat meat, since being such a strict observer of the laws, such a good Catholic, and such a staunch defender of the faith, he would have set a bad example by accepting such a gift on a holy day.

The slaughter proceeded, and in one hour, forty-nine steers had been laid out in the slaughter yard, some skinned and others about to be. It was a lively and picturesque scene, though one that brought together the most hideous, filthy, malodorous, and deformed elements of the small proletarian class typical of the Río de la Plata. However, to enable the reader to readily picture the scene, a sketch of the venue is required.

The Convalescencia or Alto Slaughter Yard is a parcel of land near the country estates south of Buenos Aires. The large rectangular lot lies at the end of two streets, one of which stops there, while the other continues eastward. This south-sloping lot is divided by a rain-carved channel lined with innumerable rat holes, with the channel bed in the rainy season collecting all of the blood, both dry and fresh, from the slaughter yard. At the right-angle junction, to the west, stands what is known as the *casilla* or judge's quarters, a low building consisting of three small, sloping-roofed rooms, with a porch along its front that faces the street and a hitching post for horses. To the rear of the building are several corrals of *ñandubay* wood, with heavy gates for securing the cattle.

In the winter these corrals are veritable quagmires. The animals crowd together, buried up to the tops of their legs in the mud, stuck together, as it were, and nearly motionless. Corral duties and fines for violations of the regulations are collected in the *casilla*, where the slaughter yard judge holds court—an important personage, the caudillo of the butchers, who wields supreme power over this small republic by delegation of the Restorer. It isn't hard to imagine the kind of man required to perform such an office. As for the *casilla*, it is such a small and shabby building that no one in the corrals would give it any importance but for the association of its name with that of the feared judge and the garish red signs painted on its white walls: "Long Live the Federation"; "Long Live the Restorer and the Heroic Doña Encarnación Ezcurra"; "Death to the Unitarian Savages." They are signs fraught with meaning, symbolic of the political and religious faith of the slaughter yard's people. But some readers will likely be unaware that the aforementioned "heroine" is the Restorer's late wife, the butchers' beloved patroness, venerated by them after her death for her Christian virtues and Federalist heroism during the revolution against Balcarce.¹⁸ It so happened that during an anniversary of that memorable feat by the *Mazorca*, the butchers celebrated with a splendid banquet in the heroine's *casilla*, which she attended with her daughter and other Federalist ladies. There, before a great crowd, she offered her Federalist patronage to the gentlemen butchers in a solemn toast, whereupon they enthusiastically proclaimed her patroness of the slaughter yard, inscribing her name on the walls of the *casilla*, where it will remain until it is erased by the hand of time.

From a distance, the slaughter yard was a grotesque, bustling sight. Forty-nine cattle were laid out on their skins, and nearly two hundred people trudged around in the sloughy ground that was drenched with the blood from the animals' arteries. A group of people of different races and complexions gathered around each steer. The most

prominent figure in each group was a butcher with knife in hand, his arms and chest bare, hair long and tangled, his shirt, *chiripá*,¹⁹ and face smeared with blood. Behind him, following his every move, was a band of swarming, capering boys and black and mulatto women, these last scavengers for chitterlings, as ugly as the viragos of legend. Intermingled among them were some huge hounds that sniffed, growled, or snapped at each other as they wrangled over a prize piece of offal. Forty-some carts covered with blackened, worn hides were ranged unevenly along the entire length of the lot. A few men on horseback, wearing ponchos and with lassoes lightly and expertly held in one hand, rode their mounts at a brisk stride amid the crowds, while others slouched over their horses' necks, training an indolent eye on one of the lively groups. Meanwhile, above them, a swarm of blue-and-white gulls, drawn back to the slaughterhouse by the smell of flesh, fluttered in the air, blanketing the slaughter yard's din and babble with dissonant squawks and casting a shadow over the field of gruesome carnage. Such was the scene at the start of the butchering.

However, as the slaughter continued, the scene began to change. The groups broke apart and new ones formed, which took on assorted attitudes, and then the people scattered at a run, as though a stray bullet had hit where they stood or the jaws of a rabid mastiff had burst into their midst. In one group, a butcher hacked at a slaughtered animal's flesh; in a second, another butcher hung up the quartered sections on wagon hooks. One skinned a carcass here, another trimmed off the fat there. And from time to time, from among the ranks of the mob that eyed and waited for a piece of offal, a grimy hand holding a knife would dart out to slice a piece of fat or meat from a steer's quarters. This would set off the butcher's shouts and explosions of anger, the renewed swarming of the groups, and the young boys' jeers and jarring shouts.

"Hey, over there! That woman is slipping fat into her bosoms!" one of them shouted. "That man stuffed it in his pants flap," retorted the black woman.

"Hey you, black witch, get out of here before I cut you open!" exclaimed the butcher.

"What have I done to you, ño Juan? Don't be mean—all I want is the belly and the guts."

"They're for that there witch—goddamn it!"

"Get the witch! Get the witch!" the young boys chanted. "She's taking the kidney fat and the liver!" And two chunks of clotted blood and some enormous mud balls began raining on her head.

In another part of the yard, two African women half-carried, half-dragged an animal's entrails. Over in another area, a mulatto woman was walking off with a ball of viscera when she suddenly slipped in a puddle of blood and fell flat on her backside, shielding her precious booty with her body. Farther away, huddled together in rows, four hundred black woman unwound a tangle of intestines in their laps. One by one, they picked off the last bits of fat that the butcher's miserly knife had left on the entrails. Meanwhile, others emptied out stomachs and bladders and filled them with air from their own lungs so that they could deposit offal inside them once they were dry.

Youths, gamboling about on foot and on horseback, smacked each other with inflated bladders or lobbed rolled pieces of meat at one another, scattering with the exploding balls of meat and their boisterous antics a cloud of seagulls that balanced in

the air, celebrating the slaughter with their raucous screeching. Despite the Restorer's prohibition against swearing and the holiness of the day, profanities and obscenities were often to be heard, vociferations laden with the bestial cynicism that is so typical of the ruffraff in our slaughter yards, and which I am disinclined to share with my readers.

Without warning a bloody lung would fall over someone's head, which was then passed on to someone else's, until some deformed hound grabbed it firmly, only to be accosted by a pack of other dogs that tried to wrest a piece of it away in a horrific melee of snarls and savage bites. An old woman set off in angry pursuit behind a young man who had smeared her face with blood. His friends, responding to the troublemaker's yelling and cursing, surrounded and harassed her the way dogs will badger a bull. She was pelted with pieces of meat and balls of dung, as well as with guffaws and repetitive shouts, until the judge commanded that order be restored and the field cleared.

To one side, two boys practiced handling their knives by throwing horrendous slashes and blows at each other. In another spot, four already-adolescent boys flicked knives at each other for the right to a thick length of intestine and a piece of tripe filched from a butcher. And not far from them, some dogs, gaunt from forced abstinence, employed the same means to see which one would carry away a mud-splattered liver. It was all a simulacrum in miniature of the barbaric ways in which individual and social issues and rights are resolved in our country. All told, the scenes unfolding in the slaughter yard were for seeing—not for consigning to paper.

One animal, with a short, thick neck and a fierce look, had been left behind in the pens. Opinions were divided regarding its genitals, because they seemed to be similar to both a bull's and a steer's. The animal's hour arrived. Two lassoers on horseback entered the corral, now surrounded by crowds milling about, some on foot, others mounted, and still others straddling the corral's gnarled timbers. The most grotesque, conspicuous group of all was standing by the gate: several expert lassoers on foot, their arms bare, each one armed with an unerring noose, bright red kerchiefs tied around their heads, wearing vests and red *chiripás*. Behind them were several riders and expectant onlookers, intently observing the scene.

The animal, a slipknot already around its horns, bellowed wildly, spraying foam from its mouth. But the devil himself could not get it to emerge from the thick slime that like glue mired down the beast and made it impossible to lasso its legs. The boys perched on the corral fence shouted at and heckled the animal, waving their ponchos and kerchiefs to no avail. The cacophony of whistles, clapping, high-pitched and guttural voices blaring from that extraordinary orchestra was something to hear.

The boorish comments and shouts of raillery and obscenities rolled from mouth to mouth, each one there making a spontaneous show of their cleverness and wit, excited by the scene or prompted by someone else's sallies.

"Son of a bitch, that bull."

"To hell with those castrated bulls from Azul."²⁰ "Damned cheating driver passed a bull off for a steer." "I'm telling you it's a steer—that's no bull!"

"Can't you see it's an old bull?"

"The hell it is—show me its balls if you're so sure, damn it!"

"There they are—he's got them between his legs. Can't you see, my friend? They're bigger than your chestnut horse's head. Or did you go blind on the way here?"

"Your mother would be the blind one, if she gave birth to a son like you. Can't you see that lump's nothing but mud?"

"You're as stubborn and ornery as a Unitarian . . ."

At the sound of the magic word they all shouted, "Death to the Unitarian savages!" "Send the sons of bitches to One-Eye."

"Yes, to One-Eye—he's got the balls for fighting Unitarians. Flank steak²¹ for Matasiete, executioner of Unitarians! Long Live Matasiete!" "The flank steak to Matasiete!"

"There he goes!" shouted a man with a guttural voice, cutting short the bluster of cowardly bullies. "There goes the bull!"

"Watch out! Look sharp you, by the gate! He's headed there, mad as a devil!" Indeed the animal—harassed by the shouting and, most of all, by two sharp cattle prods spurring his hindquarters—sensing that the noose had loosened, rushed the gate with a powerful snort, hurling fiery looks from side to side with its reddened eyes. The lassoer yanked the lariat and dislodged the noose on the bull's horn, making his horse fall back on its haunches. A sharp hiss flayed the air and, from atop a fence fork, a boy's head was seen to roll down, as though severed from the base of the neck by a hatchet blow, his motionless trunk still sitting astride its wooden horse and shooting out from every artery a long torrent of blood.

"The rope was cut!" some shouted. "There goes the bull!"

But others, bewildered and stunned, were silent, because everything had happened as quickly as though a lightning bolt had struck.

The group that was by the gate began to break up. Some crowded around the head and still-quivering body of the boy decapitated by the lasso, expressing horror at the final look of shock on its face. The others, horsemen who had not witnessed the tragedy, fanned out in different directions in pursuit of the bull, yelling and screaming, "There he goes!" "Intercept him!" "Watch out!" "Rope him, Sietepelos!" "Get away from him, Botija!" "He's furious, stay out of his way!" "Head him off, head him off, Morado!" "Spur that lazy horse!" "The bull's on Sola Street!" "The devil stop that bull!"

The riders' mad rush and the shouting were infernal. When they caught wind of the tumult, a handful of black women who had scavenged chitterlings and sat in a row along the water channel's edge curled up and crouched over the stomachs and entrails that they had been unraveling and rolling up with the patience of Penelope. This action surely saved them, because when the animal caught sight of them, it gave a terrifying snort, jumped sideways, then continued running straight ahead, the riders in hot pursuit. They say that one of the women soiled herself, another prayed ten Hail Marys in two minutes, and two promised San Benito²² never to return to those accursed corrals and to abandon the occupation of collecting entrails. It is not known whether they made good on their promise.

Meanwhile, the bull entered the city through a long, narrow street that originates from the sharpest angle of the rectangle we had described before, a street enclosed by a water canal and a living fence of prickly pear. It was called "Sola" because it had no more than two adjacent houses on it. In its flooded center was a deep mud pool that covered the road's entire width, between one canal and the other. At that moment, an Englishman returning from his saltworks on a somewhat intractable horse was slowly wading across the bog and no doubt he was so absorbed in his mental calculations that he

heard the bedlam of the onrushing riders with their infernal shouting only when the bull had already rushed into the pool of mud. Without warning, his horse spooked, bolted sideways, then broke into a gallop, leaving the poor man submerged in two feet of mud. The accident, however, neither stopped nor slowed down the headlong race of the bull's pursuers. On the contrary, they exclaimed, amid sarcastic guffaws, "The gringo screwed up!—back on your feet, gringo!" And as they crossed the morass, the mud churned up by their horses' hooves kneaded the man's miserable body. The gringo extricated himself as best he could, reaching the edge of the bog looking more like a devil browned by the fires of hell than a blond-haired white man. Farther ahead, four black women collectors of chitterlings who were heading home with their loot, upon hearing the shouts of "After the bull!" dove into the canal full of water, the only refuge left to them.

In the meantime, after having run some twenty blocks in various directions and frightening every living creature with its presence, the animal went through the palisade gate of a country home, where it met its doom. Though tired, it still showed vigor and a fierce mien. But it was surrounded by a deep canal and a thick fence of agaves, and there was no escape. Its persecutors had dispersed, but soon they banded together again and decided to use a team of oxen as a decoy and lead the bull back, to atone for its crime on the very spot where it had committed it.

One hour after its escape, the bull was back in the slaughter yard, where the few riff-raff who had stayed around spoke of nothing but its misdeeds. The gringo's adventure in the mud hole aroused mainly derisive laughter and sarcasm. Of the boy decapitated by the lasso nothing remained, except for a puddle of blood—his body was in the cemetery.

Very quickly, they roped the animal's horns as it bucked, pawed its hooves, and bellowed with rage. They threw one, two, three lassoes at it to no avail, but the fourth snared a leg. The bull's vigor and fury redoubled—its tongue stretched out convulsively, froth spewed from its mouth, smoke from its nostrils. Its eyes blazed.

"Hamstring that animal!" a commanding voice exclaimed. Matasiete jumped off his horse, slashed the bull's hock in one swing, then, dancing around it, enormous dagger in hand, buried the blade up to the hilt in the animal's neck and showed the steaming red gash to the crowd. A torrent spurted from the wound, the bull exhaled one or two hoarse bellows. Then the proud animal collapsed, amid the mob's shouts, proclaiming Matasiete's prize of a flank steak. For the second time, Matasiete proudly stretched out his arm and the bloodstained knife, then bent down to skin the animal with his comrades.

The question of the dead animal's genitals still had to be settled, though it was provisionally classified as a bull because of its indomitable ferocity. However, everyone was so exhausted from the long exertion that the matter was momentarily forgotten. But just then, a rough voice exclaimed: "Here are the balls!" Extricating two enormous testicles from the animal's belly, the man displayed them—the unmistakable marker of the animal's dignity as a bull—to the bystanders. His words were met with uproarious laughter and loud chatter—all of the lamentable incidents were now easily explained. It was an extreme rarity for a bull to turn up in the slaughter yard. It was even forbidden. The rules of proper social practice dictated that the animal be thrown to the dogs; but there was such a lack of meat, and so many inhabitants were going hungry, that His Honor the Judge was forced to turn a blind eye.

In a flash the wretched bull was skinned, quartered, and hung on the wagon. Matasiete slid the flank steak under his saddle blanket and prepared to set off. The butchering had ended at noon, and the few stragglers who had been there until the end were now leaving in groups, on foot and on horseback, or using their cinch straps to haul carts loaded with meat.

But, suddenly, a butcher shouted in a gravelly voice:

"Here comes a Unitarian!" And at the sound of the fraught word, the entire rabble stopped dead in its tracks, as though stunned.

"Can't you see his U-shaped side whiskers? He doesn't have a ribbon on his tail coat or a mourning band on his hat."

"Unitarian dog." "He's a dandy."

"He rides English saddle, like the gringos." "Give him the corncob."

"The shears!"

"He needs a whipping."

"He's got a pistol case on his saddle to look smart." "All those Unitarian dandies are a bunch of show-offs." "Bet you aren't up to it—eh, Matasiete?"

"Bet you he isn't." "Bet you he is."

Matasiete was a man of few words and much action. When it came to violence, agility, skill with the hatchet, the knife, or the horse, he was closemouthed and acted swiftly. They had piqued him: he roweled his horse and galloped, loose reined, toward the Unitarian.

The man in question was young, aged 25, elegantly dressed and good-looking. He was heading for Barracas at a trot, unaware of any impending danger, at the same time that the mob was shouting out the exclamations just heard at the tops of their lungs. He then realized that the pack of slaughter-yard guard dogs was staring ominously at him, and his right hand automatically reached for the holsters on his English saddle. That was when the sideways blow from the chest of Matasiete's horse threw him backwards over his mount's haunches, landing him on his back some distance away, where he lay quite still.

"Cheers for Matasiete!" the rabble exclaimed in unison, madly rushing at the victim like rapacious caranchos alighting on the bones of a tiger-ravaged ox.

Still dazed, the young man got up, and hurling a fiery look at the ferocious men, began walking toward his horse, which stood motionless a short distance away, intent on getting vengeance and justice with his pistols. Matasiete leapt down from his horse, and blocking him, grabbed him by the cravat and threw him to the ground, at the same time drawing his dagger from his waist and pressing it against the young man's throat.

An explosion of laughter was followed by yet another resounding "Hurrah!" that rose in the air in praise of Matasiete.

What noble souls, what courage, that of the Federalists! Always in gangs and swooping down on their defenseless victims like vultures!

"Cut his throat, Matasiete; he was going for his pistols. Slit his throat like you did the bull's."

"Mischievous Unitarian. We need to cut off his sideburns." "He's got a nice neck for the violin."

"Better to slit his throat."

"We'll give it a try," said Matasiete. He started smiling as he slid the dagger's blade across the fallen man's throat, as he pressed down on his chest with his left knee, and held his head rigid by grabbing his hair with his left hand.

"No, no—don't slit his throat," the slaughter-yard judge shouted in his imposing voice, as he approached from a distance on his horse.

"To the *casilla* with him. Prepare the corncob and the shears. Death to the Unitarian savages! Long Live the Restorer of Laws!"

"Long Live Matasiete!"

"Death!" "Long Live!" the spectators echoed in a chorus. And tying up his elbows, between blows and shoves, shouts and insults, like Christ's executioners they dragged the wretched youth to the torture bench.

In the middle of the receiving room in the *casilla*, there stood a large, massive table that was never cleared of glasses of drink and playing cards except when it was used for executions and torture by the slaughter yard's Federalist executioners. Also visible in one corner was another, smaller table with writing materials and a notebook, and a number of chairs, among which stood out the arm chair used by the judge. A man, apparently a soldier, was seated on one of the chairs, singing a *resbalosa* tune to the melody of a guitar. The song, about torturing Unitarians, was extremely popular among the Federalists. Just then, the gang reached the *casilla*'s front porch and shoved the young Unitarian toward the center of the room.

"It's your turn for the *resbalosa*," one of the men shouted at him. "Commend your soul to the devil."

"He's as furious as a wild bull."

"The stick will tame you soon enough." "He needs a whipping."

"For now, the pizzle²³ and shears." "Otherwise, the candle."

"Better the corncob."

"Silence, and sit down!" exclaimed the judge, as he sank down on an armchair. Everyone obeyed, while the young man, who was standing, confronted the judge and exclaimed in a voice full of indignation.

"Miserable killers! What do you intend to do to me?"

"Calm down!" the judge said, smiling. "No reason to lose your temper. You'll find out in time."

The young man was, in fact, beside himself with rage. His entire body seemed to be in the throes of a seizure. His pallid, bruised face, his voice, his trembling lip showed the alteration of his heart, the agitation of his nerves. His burning eyes seemed about to burst out of their sockets, his lanky black hair bristled. The veins on his bare neck throbbed visibly and his chest heaved violently beneath his shirtfront.

"Are you trembling?" the judge said to him.

"With rage, because I can't strangle you with my bare hands." "Would you have the strength and the courage for it?"

"More than enough will and courage for you, you snake."

"Let's see, bring the shears for trimming my horse's mane. Give him a trim, Federalist style."

Two men grabbed him, one by the rope binding his arms, the other by his head, and in a minute one of his side whiskers, that continued all the way down to his beard, had been sheared off. The audience exploded with laughter.

"Let's see," said the judge, "a glass of water to refresh him." "I'd make you drink a glass of gall, you scum."

A diminutive black soon stood before him with a glass of water in his hand. The young man kicked his arm, sending the glass flying and crashing against the ceiling, spattering the spectators' astonished faces.

"This one's impossible."

"We'll break him soon enough."

"Silence," said the judge. "You've already gotten a Federalist shearing. All you need is a moustache. Don't forget to grow one. Now let's get down to business. Why aren't you wearing an insignia?"

"Because I don't want to."

"Don't you know that the Restorer orders it?" "Livery is for you slaves, not for free men."

"The free men are made to wear one by force."

"Yes—force and bestial violence—those are your weapons, despicable wretches. Wolves, tigers, panthers are also strong like you; you ought to walk on all fours like them."

"Aren't you afraid that the tiger will tear you to pieces?"

"I prefer it to you tying me up and plucking out my entrails one by one, like a crow."

"Why don't you have a mourning sash on your hat in memory of the Heroine?"

"Because I wear one in my heart, in memory of the country you've murdered, you villains."

"Don't you know that the Restorer has decreed it?"

"You are the ones who've decreed it, you slaves, to flatter your master's pride and render him your disgraceful vassalage."

"Impudent fool! You've got your gorge up all right, but say another word and I'll have your tongue cut off. Pull the pants off this stupid dandy and give him the pizzle on his bare ass; tie him down tightly to the table."

Immediately the judge spoke, four blood-bespattered ruffians lifted the young man and stretched him out on top of the table, pressing down on his arms and legs.

"You'll have to cut my throat before I'll let you strip me, you bastard."

They gagged him and began to pull off his clothes. The young man curled up, kicked, clenched and grinded his teeth. Now his limbs became as pliant as a reed, now they were as hard as iron, and his spine was twisting, snake-like. Drops of sweat slid down his face, as large as pearls; his pupils flashed with anger, his mouth foamed and the veins beneath his pale skin were dark, as though turgid with blood.

"Tie him up first!" the judge shouted.

"He's roaring with rage," said one of the thugs.

Moments later they tied his legs at an angle to the table's four legs, turning his body face down. The same thing had to be done to do the same with his hands, and to do it they loosened the rope that had tied his hands behind his back. The young man felt that his hands were free, and in a violently abrupt movement that seemed to drain him of all his strength and vitality, he raised himself, first on his arms, next on his knees, then he collapsed on the table and murmured, "You'll slit my throat first before you'll strip me, filthy scum." His strength was gone.

They immediately tied him down in a crucified position and began the work of pulling off his clothes. That was when the blood gushed out, bubbling out of the young man's mouth and nose, then trickling down both sides of the table. The thugs stood motionless; the onlookers were dumbfounded.

"The savage Unitarian burst with rage," said one.

"He had a river of blood in his veins," muttered another.

"Poor devil, all we wanted was to have a bit of fun with him, and he took things too seriously," the judge declared, his tiger's brow contracted in a frown. "A report must be filed. Untie him, and let's go."

The order was carried out, they locked the door, and the mob soon trailed behind the judge as he rode his horse, head bowed, and silent.

The Federalists had concluded one of their innumerable achievements.

In those days, the slaughter yard's butchers-cum-executioners were the apostles who were sort of federation had to emerge from their heads and knives. In keeping with the jargon invented by the Restorer, the patron of their brotherhood, they labeled a "savage Unitarian" anyone who was not an executioner, a butcher, a barbarian, or a thief; any man who was decent and whose heart was in the right place; any patriot with an education who was a friend of enlightenment and freedom. The events described above may allow us to see, in all clarity, that the center of the Federation was the slaughter yard.

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Proof



August 29, 1793	1820	1825	1838	1851	1854
Slave Emancipation in Haiti	British Navy begins to suppress Slave trade	Bolivar decrees an end to Indian tribute in Bolivia	Slavery abolished in British colonies	Slave trade to Brazil ends	Ramón Castilla abolishes Indian tribute and slavery in Peru
May 13, 1888	November 15, 1889	August 7, 1908	May 1912		
Full abolition in Brazil	Fall of Brazilian Empire	Founding of Partido Independiente de Color (Cuba)	Cuban race war		

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- 11 This is the conclusion some read from reading Michel Foucault. See, for example, Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1975).
- 12 This concept figures prominently in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). Jon Beasley-Murray, offers an idea of how it applies to Latin America in *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
- 13 I draw from Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
- 14 See, for instance, Bernard Goldberg, *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News*. (New York: Perennial, 2003).

1 Independence Narratives, Past and Present

- 1 “Shot Heard Round the World,” by Bob Dorough, *Schoolhouse Rock*, 1976. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6ikO6LMxF4>.
- 2 A good place to start on Sáenz is Sarah Chambers, “Republican Friendship: Manuela Saenz Writes Women into the Nation, 1835–1856,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 81: 2, 2001, 225–257.
- 3 A free womb law declared that children born to slaves would be free.
- 4 The full letter was nearly 8,000 words long, and can be found in Spanish on the website.
- 5 See it here: <http://vimeo.com/29701339>

2 Caudillos Versus the Nation State

- 1 “[T]hey do things differently there.” From Poles Hartley, *The Go-Between* (London: H. Hamilton, 1953).
- 2 This is a system of government where power is controlled by a small number of elites.
- 3 *Mestizo* is a common term in Latin America, indicating a person with both European and Indigenous ancestry. It is often used as a racial category, but is also used as a cultural category, with no reference to physical ancestry.
- 4 Latin American liberals followed the dictates of intellectuals like Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, and believed in maximizing economic and political freedom in the interest of progress.
- 5 The term for the owners of large estates varies from region to region. They and their estates are variously known by the terms *hacendados/haciendas*, *finqueros/fincas*, *estancieros/estancias*, *latifundistas/latifundia*.
- 6 Protectoria de indígenas.
- 7 Facundo was a real *caudillo*, but the text was indirectly aimed at Rosas.
- 8 Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina*, 206.
- 9 This term describes persons from Buenos Aires.
- 10 These are owners of large estates, or *estancias*.
- 11 Florencia Mallon’s *Peasant and Nation* is fascinating on this point.
- 12 The term denotes people of mixed racial origins.
- 13 Translator’s note: The political party that opposed Rosas.
- 14 Translator’s note: In 1820, Juan Manuel de Rosas, leader of the Federalist Party, was given the title of “Restorer of the Laws” by the legislature when he reestablished the Federalists’ legal government.
- 15 Translator’s note: Refers to the British and other fair-haired, light-skinned foreigners, with a pejorative connotation.
- 16 Translator’s note: Crested *caracara* (*Polyborus plancus*), a bird of prey common to Argentina and belonging to the falcon family.

- 17 Translator's note: The Day of Sorrows was the Friday before Good Friday. Vatican Council II decided to remove it from the liturgical calendar since it duplicated the feast day of Our Lady of Sorrows, September 15.
- 18 Translator's note: Reference to the 1833 Revolution of the Restorers, which defeated the governor, Juan Ramón Balcarce, and established Juan Manuel de Rosas' dominion over the province of Buenos Aires.
- 19 Translator's note: A rectangular piece of fabric or leather wrapped around the back and front of the waist, passed between the legs over the trousers, worn for warmth and protection by farmhands, gauchos, and, in general, by the humbler elements of society, the prosperous preferring to wear the traditional short Spanish trousers called *calzón corto español*.
- 20 Translator's note: Azul was located south of the province of Buenos Aires.
- 21 Translator's note: Matasiete = Killed seven. In Lunfardo, *matahambre* means "a dead man"; "*matahambre*" or "*matambre*" is also a typical Argentine dish that translates as "rolled flank steak."
- 22 Translator's note: "Franciscan Saint and Patron of the Blacks and Mulattos of Buenos Aires," in Evelyn Picon Garfield and Iván A. Schulman, *Las literaturas hispánicas: introducción a su estudio* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991, 146).
- 23 Spanish: "verga." According to literary critics Burgos and Salessi, *El Matadero*, the term refers to the use of sodomy as a form of torture employed by the Federalists. In the story, the "verga" is clearly a whip, specifically an *arreador*, used by cowboys, herders, and carters, also called "verga de toro" because the skin of a bull's penis was used to cover its wooden handle (Diccionario Argentino, 1910). In English: "pizzle": a whip made from a bull's penis.

3 Race and Citizenship in the New Republics

- 1 Debt peonage tied workers to agricultural estates because the workers were extended a loan (sometimes involuntarily) and then required to work for a specific employer until the loan was paid off. They would often accrue more debt while working, and thus become caught in a cycle of debt.
- 2 People with African and European ancestry.
- 3 At the time Africans made up 40 percent of the island's population.
- 4 Partly due to these pressures, Britain would proclaim emancipation in 1834 for its 668,000 slaves. A system of forced apprenticeships would be abandoned amidst strikes and protests four years later.
- 5 A resident of São Paulo.
- 6 A resident of the northeast.
- 7 Capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian form of dance that invokes self-defense as a part of its form.
- 8 The entire exchange can be found at Maria Eugenia Echenique, Josefina Pelliza de Sagasta, *The Emancipation of Women: Argentina 1876*, translated by the Palouse Translation Project. *Journal of Women's History*, Volume 7, Number 3, Fall 1995, 102–126.

4 The Export Boom as Modernity

- 1 Friedman was the Nobel Prize-winning University of Chicago economist who became one of the most important advocates of free market capitalism for Latin America during the 1960s–1980s.
- 2 Clorinda Matto de Turner believed that the largely vegetarian diet consumed by Indians caused their brains to swell, and urged that more meat be introduced into their diets. She was not alone in describing what others called the "tragedy of meat," and in trying to introduce miracle cures to Indian backwardness (Manuel Gamio, the father of Mexican anthropology, later tried to introduce a tortilla made in part from soybeans).