Problems in MODERN LATIN AMERICAN HISTORY A Reader

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Making Sense of Caudillos and "Revolutions" in Nineteenth-century Latin America

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The political history of nineteenth-century Latin America confronts us with a maze of shifting alliances and a succession of leaders who rise or fall by force more often than by elections. The ubiquity of these generals on horseback, called caudillos, and the proliferation of their sometimes theatrical "revolutions" pose one of the oldest riddles to confront historians of Latin America. Nineteenth-century historians either sang the praises of caudillos or vilified them, depending on each author's political allegiance. In the early twentieth century, most historians saw caudillismo as a disorder, a sickness in the body politic, and their diagnoses often involved imputations of racial and cultural inferiority or references to the "political inexperience" of a newly independent people. More recent (and better) interpretations have emphasized the place of caudillismo within larger political, social, and economic patterns—the disappearance of effective state power, centrifugal regionalism, and the disorganization of trade—which emerged in the wake of independence.

By definition, a caudillo was a man with a personal following largely independent of any institutional leadership role. The great majority were military men. Few caudillos attracted their followers by proposing specific changes in government policy. Instead, they tended to mobilize support through family and friends, and through the networks of patronage and clientele that linked them to people below them in the social hierarchy. Large landowners were the best gatherers of voters or fighters because so many poor country people had no land and depended on them for a livelihood, and most caudillos were landowners. Once in power, caudillos acted as guarantors of the social order, almost never questioning the existing social
hierarchy. Nevertheless, they often attracted intense devotion from their popular following.

Caudillos also differed from one another in many ways. Argentina's Gen. Juan Manuel de Rosas began as a powerful landowner and entrepreneur before his political rise, whereas Mexico's Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna and many others acquired fortunes after their political triumphs. In Central America, the Liberal caudillo Gen. Francisco Morazán was a white Creole, while Conservative caudillo Gen. Rafael Carrera was a mestizo. Gen. José Antonio Páez shared the portion of African ancestry so common among his followers on the Orinoco Plains of Venezuela. Although caudillos were usually military men, some university-educated "doctors" (usually lawyers by training) functioned as caudillos, more frequently in the later nineteenth century. Benito Juárez—Zapotec Indian, jurist, president of Mexico, and friend of Abraham Lincoln—is among the most famous.

The native-born elites of nineteenth-century Latin America were intensely involved in building networks of personal alliances and vying with each other for political dominance. (The qualifier "native-born" is important, since immigrants often wielded great economic power but seldom took an active role in politics.) The best alliance builders were men with a talent for gaining other people's confidence and loyalty. Santa Anna has not won the admiration of later generations of Mexicans, but in his own time he seldom failed to impress people who met him, whether humble countrymen or foreign dignitaries. A successful caudillo became known as a good friend but also as a fierce enemy. In Argentina, Rosas dispensed vast expanses of public lands to his supporters and harassed his political adversaries with implacable brutality. Political dominance often included an element of violent force.

The selections that follow this introduction were written by nineteenth-century Latin Americans, many of whom took part in the political conflicts they describe. They reveal the frequency of rebellions and the importance of face-to-face transactions among the small groups of upper-class males who played the leading roles in politics. We begin with the autobiographical account of José Antonio Páez, the hero of Venezuelan independence, who describes an encounter of mounted lancers in the 1830s (Doc. 1), then turn to the memoir of Peruvian caudillo José Rufino Echenique, who describes a series of barracks revolts in the 1840s (Doc. 2). Next, we will look at Mexico in the 1850s, where Benito Juárez championed the Liberal cause in a major civil war (Doc. 3), and at Chile, where turbulence in the 1820s gave way by the 1840s to a long period of stable, oligarchical rule (Doc. 4).

A schematic idea of caudillo politics will help students to interpret these readings. Much nineteenth-century political life was shaped by competing networks of friends and followers, often called patronage structures. Such networks were social pyramids composed of several tiers of "vertical" patron-client relationships. At the top stood a national caudillo who counted the powerful heads of the country's great families among his friends and supporters. In the next tier down, these powerful supporters had followers of their own in the regions dominated by their families: lawyers, merchants, landowners, and military men. Such men competed for local judgeships and administrative offices. Below them were clerks, artisans, and landless rural men who depended economically on the lawyers and landowners and were expected to back them politically. People without property could rarely vote or hope to hold office, nor could women do so. Although women became involved in political struggles through brothers, fathers, and husbands, leadership remained a male prerogative.

As often as not, politics was a matter of fighting. In fact, bearing arms in a revolution was one of the main forms of political participation for nonelite Latin Americans in the aftermath of independence. Most nineteenth-century rebellions were not intended to rearrange the social order. Instead, the word "revolution" often implied simply the overthrow of a tyrant—any ruler believed to abuse power. Such revolutions were typically brief trials of strength between one elite faction, which controlled the government, and another, which aspired to do so. A challenger to the current government, encouraged by his friends and followers, issued a pronouncement declaring the current government immoral, specifying his own lack of political ambition, and announcing his willingness to sacrifice personal interests to deliver the country from the scourge of tyranny. People watched the prospective leader parade through town and countryside, gathering supporters. En route, the caudillo displayed loyalty to his friends, gallantry with women, and generosity with his social inferiors. In battle, he had to demonstrate (or conceal his lack of) physical courage and a commanding presence. The leadership quality that Latin Americans call "political prestige"—the special attraction associated with caudillos—commonly derived from their behavior in a revolution. One or two battles usually revealed the preponderance of power, and the weaker side saw little to be gained by persisting in a hopeless cause. If the revolution were defeated the rebellious caudillo would go into exile, but if fortune smiled he would make a triumphal entry into the capital city and assume the presidency. There, he would distribute the spoils of office to his loyal friends and they, in turn, would reward their own followers, down to the level of the servants and laborers who had composed the bulk of the insurgent army. Members of powerful families received cabinet ministries or lucrative business concessions and local supporters could expect preference in government employment, while the humblest followers enjoyed at least a few days of festive largesse on the part of the patron. In this way, patronage flowed down through the tiers of clientele like sap through a
branch, thus making the control of the government its own reward for the victorious faction.

So frequent did insurgency become after independence in Latin America that “revolution,” or the permanent threat of it, constituted an integral part of the political process. A full enumeration of all the military coups, guerrilla wars, regional revolts, and local uprisings that occurred during the middle decades of the nineteenth century would number in the hundreds. Brazil constitutes an important exception to this generalization, however. Given the country’s size and diversity, the number of revolutions in nineteenth-century Brazil pales by comparison with Spanish American patterns. Fortunately for the poor, who did most of the fighting in both Brazilian and Spanish American civil wars, limited aims and a general shortage of firearms kept routine political warfare from producing huge death tolls. Indeed, it may well be that more combatants died on the battlefields of the U.S. Civil War than in all the political warfare of Latin America’s tumultuous midnineteenth century. The indirect social and economic costs of these wars, on the other hand, were in calculably great.

Like most people, the authors of the following selections usually rationalize their self-serving politics as a matter of principle. Joaquim Assis Brasil, taking inspiration in a past rebellion, justifies the attempted secession of a southern Brazilian province in 1836 as a result of abusive taxation and governmental neglect reminiscent of the complaints of the English colonists of North America (Doc. 5). Many people of the midnineteenth century used the tenets of Anglo-French liberalism to attack Hispano-Catholic traditionalism, but the influence of formal ideologies was frequently subordinate to other influences and fails to explain fully the behavior of leaders and followers. For example, it was fairly common for people to switch parties to avoid opposing friends or supporting enemies. The logic of personal alliance and enmity frequently overrode all else, at least during a “revolution.”

Moreover, the formal political ideologies then available were all incompatible with the defense of upper-class privilege in highly stratified societies, a fact which significantly reduced their appeal among those active in politics. Venancio Ortiz provides a cautionary tale of some young upper-class males in Colombia who took up the cause of social equality in order to gain a following among urban artisans. According to Ortiz, the young hotheads were playing with fire in order to advance their own ambitions, and the fire quickly burned out of control (Doc. 6). Lower-class participation in the political process appears to these upper-class authors as a sign of dangerous disorder, with good reason: When the people at the bottom of the social hierarchy felt their own collective power, they sometimes used it against their “betters.”

Making Sense of Caudillos and “Revolutions”

The authors of these narratives have sometimes revealed something of how they saw their political world in the way they have “constructed” their descriptions of it. Domingos Antonio Raiol describes a race riot as an inversion of the social order, a blasphemous version of the traditional Brazilian carnival, when servants sometimes dressed up like masters. As the author recognizes explicitly, the fury of the rioting blacks and Indians flowed from centuries of mistreatment, yet he concentrates on the perversion of ritual and order rather than on matters of cause and effect. By framing events in this manner, readers and writers made sense of the violence without any unpleasant scrutiny of the tensions in their hierarchical society (Doc. 7). Nineteenth-century Latin American politics often turned on symbolic issues of identity and values. The most famous political narrator of Argentina, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, denounced the symbol-mongering of his hated foe, Rosas, in his description of the red ribbons that everyone in Buenos Aires was supposed to wear as a badge of loyalty to Rosas (Doc. 8). In addition, caudillos seemed to have been viewed as protagonists with whom followers could identify, and their “revolutions,” as occasions in which to dramatize their scorn for danger and characterize themselves as bold leaders. Somewhat surprisingly for modern readers, emotional sensitivity and disposition to self-sacrifice were central motifs in the autobiographies of many caudillos, who sought to appear as moral exemplars rather than problem solvers. The autobiography of Mexico’s Santa Anna offers a notable example (Doc. 9).

The following selections represent seven Latin American countries at the height of their postindependence turmoil. They illustrate the frequent use of armed force in political life; the terms of conflict among elite factions; the face-to-face style of patronage politics, with its emphasis on the character of leaders rather than on their programs; and the discourse of gesture and image in which political conflict was partly transacted. In entering the political world of our nineteenth-century narrators, readers should try to get a feel for the period rather than strive to understand the details of particular events. Students should simply ignore the profusion of names unaccompanied by adequate identifying information. Because they wrote for the small political class of their own countries, these authors assume a familiarity with the people and places they describe. By looking past the intricacies of the individual cases, we can better see the general patterns that explain caudillos and revolutions in nineteenth-century Latin America.
1. The Lions of Payara ◆ José Antonio Páez

The Venezuelan caudillo José Antonio Páez was a rural man of middling social origins who became a leader during the wars of independence and, afterward, the first president of Venezuela. Such social mobility was uncommon, and it usually stemmed from fighting ability. Páez’s original supporters were the mounted herdsmen of the Orinoco plains, famous for their military prowess. Charging lancers, roll calls of heroes, and paternalistic bonds between Páez and his followers give his account of 1836–37 an archaic tone reminiscent of a medieval epic. In this passage from his autobiography (written in an elevated style he would have required assistance in composing), the caudillo describes events that occurred between his two presidencies of the 1830s. Although out of office, he remained the real power behind the government at the time.

After the triumph of Independence, the cattle of the Province of Apure had been distributed among the valiant warriors of the army whose lances doomed Spanish despotism there. By distributing the herds, our country repaid their services and gave them a stake in the prosperity of the territory which they had conquered with heroism and defended with unflailing courage. Cornelio Muñoz, intrepid captain of my former guard, had property there; so did Rafael Ortega, my constant companion in hardship and glory, whose recent death still grieved me at the time of these events; then there were Francisco Guerrero (second in command of the army in Apure), Remigio Lara, Juan Angel Bravo, Facundo and Juan Antonio Mirabal, Doroteo Hurtado, León Ferrer, Andrés Palacio, Marcelo Gómez, and others whose names I have recorded already when describing my campaigns in the Llanos. Also among them were Juan Pablo and Francisco Farfán, who had aided me on more than one occasion to succeed in my desperate struggle. These two were true bedouins of the Llanos: gigantic in stature, with athletic musculature and valor bordering on the ferocious, obedient only to naked force. They had served at first in the ranks of the royalist Yánez. But when I had offered to give the rank of captain to any Llanero who brought me forty fighters, they enlisted with their followers and rode with me in Apure from that time on. If I had been strict with my troops, I would have had to punish these brothers severely, because they often deserted for a time with their men to go on plundering raids. Then they would appear again, claiming some excuse for their absence. But in those days my only prudent course was tolerance of their behavior, for I needed brave fighters.

Just before the Battle of Mucuritas the Farfán brothers disappeared on one of these escapades, and I finally threatened to lance them through if they did not get out of my sight with all their people. That is why they did not share in the glory of Mucuritas. Later I allowed them to return, and I have told elsewhere how valuable the Farfán brothers proved in the capture of Puerto Cabello in 1823. They eventually returned to their herds in Apure, and there they lived peacefully until the year 1836.

In that year they raised the flag of rebellion—according to some, in connivance with other rebels on the coast; according to others, in response to a personal affront—without even a pretext of principles to justify their uprising against the government. The government directed the governor of Apure, Gen. Cornelio Muñoz, to organize a column to march against them, providing him with men, horses, arms, money, and a few troops from other provinces. The president also authorized General Muñoz to extend any sort of clemency compatible with the dignity of the government. He well knew that an insurrection based in Apure could put the whole Republic in danger. For my part, I sent several letters to the rebel leaders, reminding them of their patriotic duty. In reply, they tried to convince me that what they demanded was no more than I had promised to the Apureños during the war: that in a free Venezuela they would have to pay no taxes. “Your demands are unjust, quite unjust,” I wrote back to them. “In no American republic are taxes lower than in Venezuela. The customs house supplies our treasury. The only internal taxes are those essential for the maintenance of public works in the provinces, which must have schools to educate the young and roads for the betterment of trade. The provinces should supply these needs with their own funds. Refusal to pay taxes for ends so important would mean an eternity of backwardness and misery.”

The rebels finally accepted the clemency offered by Muñoz in his decree of July 9, and Francisco Farfán wrote me that “ignorance of the situation, the influence of others, and the lack of any adviser who could discern right from wrong had plunged him into an error that grieved him in his heart. He had fallen into it despite his good intentions and persisted in it thoughtlessly.” He wrote: “I am aware of all the good Your Excellency has done for me, more than I can repay. But if gratitude would serve as repayment, I could bestow a wealth of it upon you, my friend and comrade, to whom I look up as a son to his father.”

What happened next will show whether Farfán’s repentance was sincere. Early in 1837 he rebelled again, this time in the Province of Guayana, proclaiming reunification with Colombia, the reform of the Constitution, the reestablishing of special judicial privileges for military officers and

clergy, the institution of trial by jury, the abolition of all taxes on rural property, a decree of amnesty for various conspirators fleeing justice, and finally the proclamation of General Marínó (the instigator of all of this) as Supreme Chief.

Cornelio Muñoz mobilized against Farfán, but his subordinates failed in their operations. Major Navarrete was defeated on the banks of the Orinoco and Colonel Mirabal was beaten on the plains of the Mercure. The rebels took Achagua and obliged Muñoz to entrench himself in San Fernando. The president then decreed the formation of an army under my orders, naming Col. Agustín Codazzi chief of staff for the Division ofApure.

Codazzi marched to the aid of Muñoz, besieged by Farfán in San Fernando, and managed to force his way into that beleaguered town. I moved my troops to San Fernando as well and, on arrival, sent Captain Mirabal’s infantry and Major Calderín’s cavalry to reconnoiter. The enemy had crossed the river and withdrawn about a mile from the city just before my arrival. My men’s horses were exhausted, so at nightfall I had the advance parties return so that the entire force would be able to resume the pursuit together. When the moon rose, I had the men take their horses across the river, and we set out at eight the next morning. Reaching the place called Rabanal, I learned that the rebels had passed hours earlier. I saw that it would be impossible to catch them with our whole army, so I took the best-mounted men on ahead, leaving the rest to come along afterward. With sixty fighters, I trotted in pursuit of a rebel force that numbered three times that. At the place called Yucu, about fifteen miles from San Fernando, I heard that they were only slightly ahead of us and, increasing the pace, I caught up with their rear guard a couple of miles from the town of Payara.

We entered the fight with that rear guard (composed of eighty men armed with carbines) and defeated them. As we chased these routed rebels through the town, my small force was divided into two groups. The enemy was waiting in a field to the west of the town: three columns of cavalry with a reserve force of infantry. The group to my right charged ahead impetuously but was repulsed, and the whole enemy army bore down upon them. Seeing this, I rushed to join them with my own group in order to face the onslaught with a compact mass of sixty lancers. In the extraordinary battle which followed, each man defended the ground within the radius he could reach with his lance, leaving an adversary sprawled there or dying there himself. Juan Pablo Farfán came personally to put me out of action, but the robust lance of my servant Rafael Salinas knocked him dead out of the saddle.

The rebels finally gave up the field, and the soldiers of the government were not less ardent in the pursuit than they had been in the heat of combat. We lost a mere two men dead and seven wounded; the rebels lost one hundred and fifty dead, among them a brother and an uncle of the ringleader, Francisco Farfán. Farfán sought his own salvation in the swiftness of his horse, and his followers fled in such disarray that one could not see ten of them together in their flight.

This deed of arms took place on April 26, 1837. I received a thousand congratulations for the victory, but they would have been more pleasant if the glory had not been won at the cost of Venezuelan blood. Such bravery, had it been displayed in the face of a foreign foe, would have moved the grateful nation to erect a battlefield monument to The Lions of Payara.

2. "I Met Vidal on His Way to the Palace" ◆ José Rufino Echenique

The most famous caudillos were those who became president of their countries, as did José Rufino Echenique of Peru (1851–1854). This extract from his memoir describes what occurred in the 1840s, before he became president. Echenique shows how personal alliances and barracks revolts structured political life after highland-based rural caudillos wrested leadership from the aristocracy of Lima in the 1830s and 1840s. When the scene opens, a friend of Echenique’s has just tried a revolution and failed.

I had left my hacienda and come to Lima to buy some mules that I had heard were on sale near the port. Passing the street which runs in front of the Palace of Government, I met my friend Colonel Ros, who told me of Hercelles’s defeat. He also said that Hercelles himself had been captured and was presently being brought as a prisoner to Lima, but that an order had been issued to execute him before arriving. Ros added that I could probably save Hercelles if I tried, because of the great influence that I had with [Acting President] Vidal. It was true that I did have influence with Vidal, and since I was Hercelles’s friend I went straight to the Palace. Vidal was not there, but they told me that I might speak with La Fuente, a government minister with particular sway over Vidal, so I went to speak with him about the matter. I found him surrounded by many important figures, among them the minister Lazo, all talking about Hercelles. With his characteristic emphasis, La Fuente spoke of the order which had been given, saying that Hercelles should be shot the moment it was received, and declared that the government would do the same five hundred times to stop revolutions.

Several of his interlocutors voiced their agreement. You may be sure that this resolution wounded my patriotism because I considered it tyranny. Overcome by my feelings, I said nothing, but withdrew, determined to reach Vidal. They had told me he was at his house, and I headed that way.

As it happened, I met Vidal on his way to the Palace, and we returned there together. As soon as we were alone, I told him why I was looking for him, and I was astonished to hear him simply repeat the same words I had heard from La Fuente. Sensitive by nature, I also have an unfortunately violent temper, and I took offense that he should speak to me in that way. His arbitrary threats constituted a horrible tyranny for the nation, and furthermore, the man he intended to destroy was my good friend. I made up my mind first to save my friend, and then to help overthrow a government of methods so antithetical to laws and rights. This decision, unhappily, became the cause of all that befell me later: the loss of my privileged situation and of the bright future which corresponded to it.

As soon as I got home, steadfast in my purpose, I sent for a well-known war captain named Contreras who was extremely loyal to me. I told him to gather twenty-five men of absolute trustworthiness, to arm them, to lead them out the road to Cuncay, to ambush the party that was bringing Hercelles prisoner, and to rescue him. He agreed but, as he gathered the men and arms, the news arrived that Hercelles had been executed immediately upon receipt of the order to that effect. Not only that, his head had been cut off and sent to the place where he began the revolution, to be displayed as an example and a warning. Lazo, the Minister of Government, gave that order, and it was the last straw for me. I determined to move against the government at the first opportunity.

Shortly thereafter we learned of a revolution in favor of General Vivanco, which had taken place in Arequipa. The well-known patriotism, ability, honesty, and honorable sentiments of General Vivanco gave everyone high hopes for the future progress and stability of the country. By this time the government had fallen into complete disrepute. Besides not doing anything to benefit the nation, the government had lost even institutional legitimacy because, at the death of Gamarra, the presidency should have gone to Menéndez, who was chairman of the Executive Council, or to Vice President Figueroa, and not to Vidal, who had been merely assistant to the Vice President. Consequently, the revolution spread quickly to Cuzco, and then to Ayacucho, where General Pezet joined with his division. In Lima, there were four corps which I decided to bring into the revolution without having communicated with Vivanco. I began by establishing contact with some of the officers, and I found them favorably disposed. When Figueroa assumed the presidency and made Castilla Minister of War, these corps were now under his command. But I could not turn back because I had already made commitments to some supporters of Vivanco. In addition, I had the highest opinion of Vivanco and felt it my patriotic duty to help him put him in power. Foolishly, I thought that my responsibilities would end with the triumph of the revolution and that I would then be able to return to the peace and quiet of my hacienda. Most important, two high officers had solemnly committed themselves to move the moment that I gave the command.

I do not know whether or not Castilla found out about the revolutionary plans, but for some reason he sent the four corps under his command to spend the night in the main plaza of Lima. I received word of this maneuver, which was taken for a sign that the revolution had been discovered, and without hesitation I went to talk with the officers loyal to me, judging that the time was ripe. We encountered little resistance from the officers in command of the other two corps. They, too, put themselves at my orders when I proclaimed Vivanco to be Supreme Chief of the Republic. The next day, most of the leading citizens of the city met to proclaim the same thing. They also named me mayor and military commander of Lima. I could find no way to decline these honors and so accepted them, trusting that it would be only until the arrival of Vivanco, at which time I could get rid of these responsibilities and go back to my private occupations. In the meantime, I persecuted no one and allowed Castilla himself to remain free in his own house.

A few days later I heard that Castilla was conspiring with another officer to bring down the revolution on a certain night. That night I went to the barracks where the reaction was supposed to begin, and I stayed there until dawn. Nothing happened, and people's apprehension began to dissipate. Then I learned that Colonel Alvarado Ortiz was on his way to Lima from Jauja with two battalions. Some said that he supported Vivanco; and others, that he meant to restore the constitutional government. When he arrived, I had him bivouac his troops in Lurín as a precaution, but without letting him know that I did not trust him. Next, General Pezet arrived with the force which had announced for Vivanco in Ayacucho. Because of his rank I put my soldiers at his disposition, but I continued in the office of mayor.

Everyone knows how well I executed my duties as mayor. It is enough to say that I neglected nothing and enjoyed wide popularity. Pezet and I got along excellently. He continued the policy of not bothering anyone for political reasons. Still, we could not rest easy because we had no news of Vivanco, not a word, and all the time we heard rumors of thriving conspiracies to bring back the constitutional government.

Finally, we learned that Vivanco had arrived in Jauja and was continuing to Lima, so we prepared him a splendid reception with the enthusiastic participation of the people, who seemed well pleased with the new order of
3. “Juárez Was Indeed a Man” ◆ Justo Sierra

This account of Mexico’s Three Years’ War (1858–1860) was published at the turn of the century by Mexican historian and political thinker Justo Sierra, a leading Liberal. Sierra praises the Liberal president Benito Juárez, whose moral virtues contrast sharply with the selfish ambition of his opponents. Bold use of force was admired, but nineteenth-century Latin Americans stressed matters of character in their descriptions of caudillos. The career of Juárez also shows that, although frequently disobeyed, constitutional authority remained an important political asset for those who could claim it. The Three Years’ War ended a generation of Conservative hegemony closely associated with the Mexican caudillo Antonio López de Santa Anna (see Doc. 9).

Santa Anna’s dictatorship, with unflagging zeal, had set about restoring the vigor and refurbishing the splendor of the army. And a group of young, ambitious officers, trained in the Military College or in the practical school of civil strife, had begun, in the dictator’s flamboyant new regiments, to push aside such veterans of his revolts and of the war with the United States as Félix M. Zuloaga, Manuel Robles Pezuela, Miguel Echeagaray, and Adrián Wolff. Between these and the youngest of the new generals, Luis G. Osollo and Miguel Miramón, leaders of the forces which overthrew Comonfort, the transition was represented by a number of terribly fanatical warriors whose archetypes were Leonardo Márquez, Tomás Mejía, and the two Cobos, José María and Marcelino R. Nearly all of these men, forming a narrow circle in the capital of the Republic, were devout believers in military privilege, contemptuous of those governments that tried to lean on the national guard, and, from professional pride, lovers of war for war’s sake. They could count on the applause of high society, of the rich, whose hatred of reformist ideas had become a religion; they could count on the coffers of the clergy, and, confident of their military prowess, they resolved to conquer the Republic at sword’s point and then see who could stay on top. This was to be, for them, an exciting adventure, which they undertook without compunction and with boundless valor.

First, they had to have a president. So they called together, in the capital, the most prominent politicians, lawyers, clergymen, journalists, generals, and landowners of the reactionary party, who then picked General Zuloaga, author of the Plan of Tacubaya, as being the candidate least apt to collide with the highly explosive ambitions of the rest. Then the army was set in march for the interior, the heartland. With what objective?

In the center of the Bajío, between Querétaro, Guanajuato, and Jalisco, a nucleus of resistance to the anticonstitutionalist coup had been organized. This became a vital nucleus when Juárez arrived, seeking the protection of the tristate coalition, which forthwith proclaimed him legitimate head of the nation. In the face of such catastrophes as Comonfort’s flight and the apparent triumph of the reaction, he raised the banner of legality. He himself, in truth, was all that remained of legality, for no other officer or organ of the constitutional government was in a position to function: he exercised every power—the executive, the legislative, and the judicial—all at the same time and represented the whole people. Nothing of the sort was provided for by the Constitution, but, in the circumstances, nothing else could be done. The rights of individuals had to be suspended, and the grim specters of execution for political offenses, of confiscation, of banishment, sat on the closed book of a Constitution that survived only in the person of one man.

Juárez was indeed a man. As an intellectual, he was far inferior to his two collaborators, Ocampo and Lerdo de Tejada. Ocampo, his thought pervaded by a passion for liberty and a love of nature, was a true pagan, like the authors of the French Encyclopedia, and the strength of his basic optimism inspired him to prophetic heights. Although less of a philosopher, Lerdo de Tejada had an acute understanding of the economic problems intrinsic in the social and political structure; a Mexican Turgot, he devoted his entire life to the diagnosis of the malady, and his entire energy to its cure. Juárez possessed the great virtue of the indigenous race, to which, without a single drop of admixture, he belonged, and this virtue is perseverance. His fellow believers in Reform had faith in its inevitable triumph. So did he, but success, to him, was a secondary matter. What came first was the performance of his duty, even if the consequence was to be disaster and death. What he sought, far beyond the Constitution and the Reform, was the redemption of the indigenous people. In his pursuit of this ideal he never
leader of the 1830s. Because Portales put an early end to Chile’s postindependence instability, Barros Arana portrays him as a patriotic hero. When the narrative opens in 1830, Portales is extending his influence in the absence of Bernardo O’Higgins, the caudillo of Chilean independence, who has left the country.

Although the stability of the new order of things seemed firmer every day, one could also detect certain seeds of discontent which were no doubt worrisome to the government. Men whose cooperation had been rather important in the triumph of the [recent] revolution now showed their displeasure with the way things were going, either because of their own political ill fortune, or because of the sometimes immoderate and offensive manner in which government minister Diego Portales increased his control of the ruling party. Two of the senators recently elected to the new Congress—men whose experience and intelligence could have contributed much—resigned their seats in the Senate. The senator-elect for Valdivia, don Diego José Benavente, who had quarreled with Portales over an extremely vexatious personal incident, resigned his Senate seat, declaring that his health and the administration of his family’s property would keep him away from the capital. In a similar fashion, Dr. José Antonio Rodríguez resigned his seat representing the Province of Concepción, alleging that his health and his family business necessitated a total withdrawal from public life. Rodríguez’s principal motive for participation in the revolution of 1829 had been a desire to restore Gen. Bernardo O’Higgins to his titles, honors, and political influence; but Portales, wary of the sway which O’Higgins might exercise over the new president, had opposed the general’s return to Chile. The Senate could not prevail on either of these two senators to withdraw his resignation. Adamant in their decisions, both refused to attend sessions of the legislature and isolated themselves from political life. Benavente’s attitude was such that he became regarded as an enemy of the administration.

The alienation of these two figures clearly lessened the prestige of the government, without yet causing alarm to those interested in maintaining the country’s political stability. On the other hand, the continuing dissatisfaction of the ousted party and of the many officers who lost their commissions because of the revolution could not but inspire the most serious misgivings. The pecuniary hardship which these men now suffered through the loss of their titles and salaries (a loss which they sincerely believed to have been flagrantly unjust), and the idea that, as in previous years, the troops could be led easily to mutiny and revolt, effectively turned these men into habitual conspirators. So, beginning in 1831, Chile suffered a more or less unconnected series of subversive plots. Neither the vigilance through which these plots were detected nor the severity with

4. The Powerful Minister Portales ★ Diego Barros Arana

In Chile as throughout Latin America, struggles over government patronage became a frequent type of political conflict. This passage by the late-nineteenth-century historian Diego Barros Arana illustrates how elite males competed for a commodity in limited supply: office and rank appropriate to their social station. It also shows how the period’s historians searched for legitimating images of political consensus. Barros Arana describes the creation of a stable oligarchical state under Diego Portales, a dictatorial

which they were repressed could quench the rebellious spirit that inspired them. . . .

Then, in June 1837, came the terrible mutiny of Quillota, which cost Portales his life and was instigated by a military leader enjoying the favor and confidence of the famous minister. That revolt was put down and severely punished owing to the reigning spirit of order in the country (represented in this case by the National Guard, an institution developed from its inception by Portales). Quillota constitutes one of the most painful pages of our history. Whatever errors might have been committed by Diego Portales, the elevation of his character, his absolute honesty, the purity of his patriotism, and his clear understanding of the need to give our country a solid and stable political organization have made him deserving of the gratitude of posterity and of the aureola of glory which surrounds his name.

That bloody mutiny was, we repeat, punished with implacable severity; but in the following months the government’s actions grew less harsh. This deplorable crisis seems to have demonstrated to the powerful minister’s successors in the government of Chile that Portales’s style of rule, with its permanent courts-martial and irrevocable death sentences, was not the most conducive to stability of the state. A more moderate and conciliatory policy, initiated shortly after the repression of the mutiny, reduced the frequency of conspiracies; it contributed more effectively to the public tranquility than had the persecutions and trials. A glorious foreign war, conducted with rare good fortune, laid firm foundations for Chile’s international power and credit. In a matter of months we had destroyed the Peruvian-Bolivian Confederation which sought to achieve an overbearing hegemony on our continent. The victories won in that struggle, by exalting our national pride and turning our spirits away from civil strife, were largely responsible for the peace and well-being subsequently enjoyed by the Republic.

The new policy gained momentum under the presidency inaugurated in 1841. Elevated to the office of chief executive after his recent triumphs in Peru, Gen. Manuel Bulnes was determined to put an end to the political enmities produced by earlier civil wars. Domestic peace fostered all the manifestations of progress in our country. Though its well-being has not been uninterrupted, and though its moral and material development has encountered unfortunate obstacles from time to time, still, the Republic of Chile, no more than a poor and obscure Spanish colony in 1810, can be proud of the degree of progress achieved since independence.

5. The Brief Rio Grandense Republic  ◆  Joaquim Assis Brasil

In large countries such as Brazil, regional conflict was common throughout the middle years of the nineteenth century. During the attempted secession of the Brazilian province of Rio Grande do Sul from 1836 to 1845, rebellious elites mobilized support against the central government partly through appeals to regionalist sentiment, identifying their class interests with those of the Rio Grandense people as a whole. In the 1880s, Joaquim Assis Brasil, a law student and future political leader, described the origins of the Rio Grandense Republic to invoke historical antecedents for the federal republic that he and other young Republicans still dreamed of creating. Brazil finally became a republic in 1889.

People who are not prosperous naturally assign much of the responsibility for their problems to the government. That is what occurred in the province of Rio Grande, except that the complaints of people there were absolutely justified, even more justified than they supposed. The central government declared wars which required the services of the courageous sons of the province; the central government siphoned off the wealth of the province, leaving it prostrate; but the central government never tried to give the province the kind of protection which every young settlement needs at the beginning. To the contrary, the central government seemed always to be trying to frustrate the creation of wealth in the poor province of Rio Grande.

It levied taxes which were exorbitant in scale and absurd in conception, weighing heaviest on precisely those activities which the laws should have stimulated most. An extremely high tax of six hundred réis was exacted on each exported arroba [a measure of about thirty pounds] of jerked beef. As a result, Rio Grande’s all-important cattle industry declined rapidly when it should have thrived. Meanwhile, the cattle industry of the Rio de la Plata (which paid very light taxes) supplied increasing amounts of competing products to the Brazilian market. Cowhides shipped out of the province of Rio Grande paid an onerous tax of one fifth their value when destined for the domestic market and even more when destined for foreign ports. And what made this absurd tax still more absurd was the fact that it had to be paid in kind rather than in money. For example, if a man had traveled through the

interior and endured enormous hardships to buy hides and had managed to collect a thousand of them, he would then have to deliver two hundred of these hides to revenue agents, losing a major part of his profit-making potential...

The evils of centralization, which deprive people of liberty, had never been so evident. The central government did not know the needs of the province or, at any rate, those needs did not affect the Empire directly, so nothing was done. The exploited and exhausted province itself had no way to meet its own pressing needs; local initiative could not exist in a system where everything depended on the center. The province had many large rivers and wide, open plains which offered easy communications in any direction, and yet this potential could not be developed without vessels to ply the rivers or bridges to cross them when the waters were high. The bridge at Rio Pardo was the only one in the province.

Education was supported exclusively by private funds. As late as 1820 the government did not maintain even one primary school, and a Latin school existed only in Porto Alegre. When the government finally decided to create public schools in a few localities, it budgeted a laughable one hundred réis a year for the teachers’ salaries. As could have been foreseen, none of these schools was ever opened since they could never get teachers at less than nine réis a month. Only the Rio Grandense’s natural inclination for education, still evident today, explains why there were many tolerably educated men in the province in those years. Those who educated themselves out of their own pockets could not but be enemies of that unnatural government which took so much without giving anything in return.

The disappointments and resentments smoldered and became hatred. In the spirit of each Rio Grandense emerged the conviction that the province desperately needed liberty: the sovereign power over what pertains to oneself alone. With that idea, the road to federation had been opened, and the people would soon gather the momentum needed to burst the ties which kept them from traveling down it...

[A revolt against the central government began in 1835 and enjoyed a number of victories during its first year. But the Brazilian Empire had resources far greater than those of its rebellious province.]

Continual reinforcements of men and materiel arrived from the Imperial capital of Rio de Janeiro, where the government justified its actions (more from partisan hatred than love of country) by painting the Rio Grandense revolutionaries as bloodthirsty beasts. Almost everyone in the province patriotically supported the revolution; those who fought against it were mostly natives of other provinces or of other countries, especially Portugal. The patriot leaders were repelled by the idea of surrendering their arms, sterilizing the revolution, putting themselves at the mercy of foreigners, and subjecting themselves to an unavoidable reaction (only disguised by an amnesty). Reconciliation remained impossible, since both sides hoped for victory, but an indefinite continuation of the war would be unbearable for the Rio Grandenses. An attempt to overthrow the central government was certain to be defeated in the end.

Considering these alternatives, the revolutionaries soon came to the unanimous conclusion that there existed only one road out of their difficulties: the separation of the province from the Brazilian union, with whose government all chance of harmony had been lost. And that is how the crisis was resolved.

On September 12, 1836, General Netto camped on the left bank of the Rio Jaguarão, the extreme southern edge of Brazilian territory. That afternoon, he rode before his comrades in arms and addressed them. It had been a year already, he said, since the province had risen in revolt. The aim of the revolution was to free Rio Grande from a despised faction of political retrogrades, most of whom were outsiders. But the government persecuted the revolutionary leaders and frustrated their efforts to expel the retrogrades. In the present circumstances, he went on, only two courses of action lay open: submission, with loss of liberty; or secession of the province, with enormous sacrifice but a triumph of principles. The latter course alone was honorable and patriotic. For his part, he was disposed to any sacrifice. Seceeding from Brazil, the Rio Grandenses would form a free and independent republic but would continue to love their Brazilian brothers and would be ever ready to accept an equitable confederation with the other provinces. The general proclaimed that the great majority of Rio Grandenses would support independence since they were for the revolution and only foreigners opposed it. The cause of independence attracted all the peoples of the earth, especially those of the neighboring republics, which would surely lend a hand. For all these reasons, he called for his brothers in arms to raise the cry of Rio Grandense independence and liberty, and he shouted: “Long Live the Rio Grandense Republic, Long Live Its Defenders, Long Live Our Religion, and Long Live Bento Gonçalves!” The column of troops responded with an enthusiastic roar. And that is how the Rio Grandense Republic was proclaimed, on September 12, 1836, on the left bank of the Rio Jaguarão.

Liberal assaults against conservative traditionalism constituted a major axis of conflict in nineteenth-century Latin America. Like other conservative spokesmen, Colombian historian Venancio Ortiz developed intellectual critiques of political experimentation and attempted to justify upper-class privilege in a hierarchic society. The ideological innovators, for their part, opened some new opportunities for social mobility, but their friends and followers were the principal beneficiaries of the innovations. Liberalism (and even early socialist ideas) held little appeal for the common people, and elite factions avoided social radicalism for reasons obvious in this cautionary tale written in the 1850s, shortly after the events it describes.

After New Granada was set up as an independent republic, its citizens began to display various political leanings. Some wanted a strong government to be the guarantor of the social order, and they wanted our religion to serve as the foundation of the republic. This party, which was more or less intolerant of opposing ideas, received the appellation of “retrograde.” Others viewed religion as a barrier to intellectual progress and as a bastion of despotism, and they wanted a government that could in no way circumscribe individual liberty. These men composed the party called “progressive.”

Both parties represented extremes, though one must recognize that sincere men within each party believed the triumph of their ideas would redound to the good of the country; and both parties tried to manipulate the ignorant multitudes, attracting them into their ranks with flattering promises. Now, the multitudes did not understand much about political matters, but they did have respect and affection for the Catholic religion, which the “retrogrades” vowed to protect, and so the majority soon supported the retrogrades. . . .

This ruling party counted among its members almost all of the country’s principal businessmen and many fine minds, men belonging to families which, because of lineage or wealth, boasted long and distinguished participation in the affairs of the Republic. Since public life already abounded in capable and powerful men, it was hard for new men to enter influential circles. One had to be extremely rich, well connected, or intelligent; and most ambitious young men were treated with a degree of disparagement. Young men who wanted to make a name for themselves generally failed unless they had outstanding qualities. Therefore, a good part of that element of society which Pericles compared to the springtime of the year, the youth, became convinced that the Republic lay in the hands of an oligarchy, and they swore to fight it with any means at their disposal.

So a number of these young men established contact with leading artisans and formed a “Progressive Artisans’ and Laborers’ Society,” later given the nickname of “Democratic Society.” Here they preached to the common people a doctrine essentially abolitionist in nature and argued that the ruling party, supported by the church and the wealthy, had created a tyranny. The fact that one man named Mosquera was archbishop and another Mosquera was president, and that former president Herrán had married Mosquera’s daughter—with other facts of similar insignificance—were used cleverly to persuade people that a certain circle wanted to perpetuate its own power. The speakers referred to that group as “nobles” with a bitter, ironic smile, making the members of the Society twist in their seats as if touched with a hot iron. . . .

Most of the rich people were conservative, and since they got richer all the time and wanted to have less to do with the poor people, the educated leaders of the Democratic Society presented the rich as oppressors and exploiters. And when they preached humanitarian ideas, they founded them on communist principles, calling all property a form of robbery. All good faith then disappeared, and they organized bands of brigands to terrorize the capital. In daily dealings, everyone tried to deceive everyone else, and trade was crippled due to the lack of trust. The fairer sex, in whose heart is rooted the tree which nourishes society, became contaminated by these anarchic principles; women began to scoff at religious practices and to sell their favors. If this sort of thing happened among educated people, you can imagine how the lower classes behaved. The social edifice had been undermined and threatened to come crashing down. . . .

[The Democratic Society centered its attention on a tariff matter under consideration in the legislature.]

From very early in the morning, the crowd began to occupy the hall of the legislature, the large gallery at the entrance of the building, and part of the plaza in front. They had been convinced that their interests would be favored by a measure prohibiting the importation of articles against which the artisans of Bogotá could not compete. They were no less attracted by the idea of punishing those whom they believed to be their enemies. At ten o’clock, the House of Representatives began its session with consideration of a committee resolution whereby the proposal of the Democratic Society would be sent to the Senate so that it might be taken into account later
during the debate on tariffs. The discussion had hardly opened when insults and threats against members of the legislature rang out from the gallery, and next, cries of “Down with” this and that. But then answering cries were heard from decent young men from both parties who had mingled with the crowd of Democrats and were determined to sacrifice their lives, if necessary, to defend our country’s representative institutions. The Democrats saw that they could not bully and kill with impunity, but that they would have to fight and defeat noble adversaries whom they could not but fear. This sudden realization made them change their plan. Though they were already numerous, they tried to gain a crushing advantage by calling upon the crowd outside. The cry was raised in the plaza: “Inside!” And the multitude surged into the building where the representatives were meeting. While several citizens worked prodigiously to restrain the mob, the secretaries of government and finance, Sr. Patrocinio Cuéllar and Sr. José María Plata, urged the chairman to call in the armed forces. . . . In spite of everything, the discussion continued and, disregarding the danger which surrounded them, the representatives fulfilled their duty with a steadiness worthy of their high station. Suddenly, the shouting increased, and the crowd again pushed its way into the hall, this time almost reaching the first row of seats. . . . Some young men jumped down from the upper gallery, thinking that a fight with the mob was inevitable, and others from the lower gallery leapt onto the floor of the chamber to join them. The rioters contained themselves, and the representatives voted on, and approved, the resolution. So the Democrats left the hall, determined to find a more open battleground on which to attack the representatives, who, for their part, continued calmly at their business and adjourned the session at the accustomed hour. They left the building escorted by citizens determined to defend them against their assailants. Thwarted by such courage, the hecklers kept their distance and threw rocks.

7. Uproar in Pará: Blasphemous Carnival or Race Riot? • Domingos Antonio Raiol

Nineteenth-century writers such as the Brazilian Domingos Antonio Raiol often put symbolic constructions on political events which modern analysts would view strictly in terms of cause and effect. Looking back from later in


Making Sense of Caudillos and “Revolutions”

the century, Raiol describes how the rebel capture of the provincial capital of Pará, or Belém, in 1835 became a race riot. Raiol explains that the blacks and Indians harbored “a long-repressed desire for revenge” against their white masters, but he pictures the events not as the natural result of oppression but as a grotesque, totally aberrant inversion of the social order. Episodes of this kind were rare, but their power over the upper-class imagination will be evident here.

After the government forces were withdrawn to Tatuoca Island, the capital of Pará lay in rebel hands! In the early dawn of August 23, 1835, Eduardo Angelini was out inspecting and reinforcing the city’s riverside defenses! Some say he knew nothing about the Marshal’s withdrawal during the night, because he had not opposed the slightest resistance, as if knowing nothing about it. Indeed, he may not have known, or he may have feared for the well-being of the families who embarked in the same warships. Angelini himself told me that he had desired no further bloodshed. However that may be, the only people who remained in Belém unwillingly were those who had not heard in time that the ships were leaving.

Angelini’s first responsibility was to control the unhinging violence of his men, and in justice it must be said that he used all the means at his disposal to do this. Still, the frenzy of the rebellious population was such that his efforts often failed. Groups scattered through the main streets of the city, breaking down doors, entering houses, plundering commercial establishments, abusing and raping decent women, and murdering any man in their paths, without respecting even the sanctuary of the churches in which many of their victims had taken refuge!

The night before, a government detachment had occupied the Church of the Virgin of Carmo and, through an oversight, these men had not been notified when the Marshal’s forces were withdrawn. On the morning of August 23, this group was caught by the rebels, who spared no one in the church. A few managed to escape over the wall behind the convent, but others thought they would be safer hiding behind the altar or among the various shrines. The villains found them there, however, and dragged them in brutal triumph out to the street, where the victims were rent by machete blows and shotgun blasts amid hellish howling!

That horrid butchery claimed sixteen victims, among them, retired Cols. José Narciso da Costa Rocha and Manuel Pinto Gomes, Maj. João Inácio Cavallero, Antônio Rodrigues Neves, and other prominent citizens. In their anguish, neither pleas for mercy nor the presence of sacred images could save them. Upon hearing their cries and lamentations, the bishop sent Geraldo Gavião to intercede on behalf of the few whom the rioters had not yet sacrificed, and Gavião escorted these fortunate few to the bishop’s house nearby.
But no power could long restrain the incredible cruelty of the rioters, and the capital descended into total anarchy. When the rebels learned that the Marshal had left during the night, they opened the churches and set the bells ringing in jubilation, and they chanted strings of prayers in the cathedral. They shouted “Long Live Liberty” and “Death to the Government and to the Cowardly Fugitives”; they exploded fireworks, and they decorated the streets with banners. They greeted the people and congratulated their leaders, and finally they dispersed in unruly bands through the city, threatening the safety of person and property!

Foremost among those guilty of atrocities were certain slaves and freedmen who left their masters’ houses and went to tell on them. These men committed the greatest outrages against the sanctity of the home: making foul, threatening advances to white women and, upon being rejected with natural repugnance, beating them as punishment! And let us not forget to say that during three days and three nights there were meetings, speech-making, singing of hymns and serenades, and parades and celebrations of every kind. Houses were required to put lights in their windows. All this in tribute to the solemn triumph of the morality and justice of so holy a cause, according to the proclamations of the apparent victors, delivered in scenes of indescribable uproar and disorder. While so diverting itself, a mob will forget its suffering, and such entertainments are the best means of distracting it from more serious matters.

The anarchy increased with the immoderate use of alcoholic drinks. The excesses of the seditious crowds knew no limits. They entered brazenly into the houses which they found open and broke into those which were closed against them, searching for suspected Masons and cararumas [members of the most reactionary party], which they generally considered all white men to be. And they thought the same of the Portuguese, whom they called “sailors” or “long beaks.” Fortunately, almost all the Portuguese had left. The few who had hidden themselves in the city, though they might be unarmed, sick or decrepit, and completely harmless, were murdered without compassion...

The rioters perpetrated countless outrages during their rampage through the province. Like the grim struggle between Roman plebeians and patricians, the revolt of the caboones [as these Brazilian rebels were called] became a fight to the death against the upper classes, only more cruel and savage because unmotivated by any higher principle or general interest. Since it did not offer solutions to any social problems, the rebellion degenerated naturally into a chaotic bloodbath fueled by racial hatred. It was a hatred arising from the insults and abuses which the Indians, the blacks, and the people of mixed blood believed they had suffered—a hatred they had carried inside from colonial times and held back for many years and which

burst forth in those dark days against their real or imagined oppressors. Nothing else explains the tremendous savagery of the rebels, whose every act demonstrated a long-repressed desire for revenge.

8. Rosas’s Ribbons and Rituals •

Domingo Faustino Sarmiento

One can often interpret political actions as symbolism. The Argentine caudillo Juan Manuel de Rosas used lapel ribbons and church rituals to signify public conformity under his rule. His enemy Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (who later became president himself) ridiculed Rosas’s symbolism in this passage taken from Facundo, or Civilization and Barbarism, the single most influential interpretation of nineteenth-century Argentina, but the book’s own case is heavily symbolic, too. Facundo Quiroga, the apparent subject of the biography, was a lesser caudillo whom Sarmiento uses merely to personify the barbarity of Argentina under Rosas. Here, Facundo himself does not appear at all.

Finally, Rosas has the government in his hands. Facundo has died a month earlier; the city has placed itself at his discretion; the people have candidly confirmed their surrender of all rights and institutions. The State is a blank slate on which he will write something new and original. He is a poet, a Plato who will now bring into being the ideal republic which he has conceived; he has meditated upon this labor for twenty years, and now he can finally bring it forth unimpeded by stale traditions, current events, imitations of Europe, individual rights, or existing institutions. He is a genius, in short, who has been lamenting the ills of his century and preparing himself to destroy them with one blow. All will be new, a work of his creative faculty. Let us observe this prodigy.

Leaving the House of Representatives, where he went to receive his staff of office, he withdraws in a coach painted red expressly for the ceremony. Yoked to the coach by cords of red silk are the men who, with criminal impunity, have kept the city in a state of continual alarm since 1833; they style themselves the People’s Society, and they wear knives at the waist, red vests, and red ribbons with the slogan: “Death to the Unitarians.” At the door of his house, these same men form an honor guard. Next he gives audience to citizens, and then to generals; everyone must show his limitless personal loyalty to the Restorer.

The next day, a proclamation appears with a list of proscriptions. (One of the proscripted is a relative by marriage, Doctor Alsina.) This proclamation, one of Rosas’s few writings, is a wonderful document that I am sorry not to have on hand. It was his program of government, undisguised and unambiguous: \textit{W}hoe\textit{v}er \textit{Is} Not \textit{With} Me \textit{Is} My \textit{E}n\textit{e}my. That is the axiom of policy enshrined in the document, which announces that blood will flow, and promises only that property will be respected. Woe to those who provoke his fury!

Four days later, the parish of San Francisco announces its intention to celebrate a Mass and Te Deum to give thanks to the Almighty, etc., inviting the people of the neighborhood to solemnize the event with their presence. The surrounding streets are dressed with banners, bunting, and carpets. The place becomes an Oriental bazaar displaying tapestries of damask, purple, gold, and jewels in whimsical array. People throng the streets; young people who are attracted by the novelty, ladies who have chosen the parish for their afternoon stroll. The Te Deum is postponed for a day, and the city’s excitement—the agitated coming and going, the interruption of all work—lasts for four or five days in a row. The \textit{Gazette} supplies the most insignificant details of the splendid event. And eight days later, another parish announces its Te Deum. The people of that neighborhood are determined to surpass the enthusiasm of the first, to outdo the first celebration. What excess of decoration! What ostentation of wealth and adornment! The portrait of the Restorer is placed on a dais in the street, swathed in red velvet, with golden cords and braid. The hubbub returns, for as many more days. In the privileged parish, people seem to live in the street. And, a few days later, there is another celebration, in another parish in another neighborhood. But how long can this go on? Do these people never tire of spectacles? What sort of enthusiasm is this, which does not subside in a month? Why do not all the parishes have their celebrations at the same time? No, it is a systematic, organized enthusiasm, administered a little at a time. A year later the parishes still have not concluded their celebrations. The official giddiness has passed from the city to the countryside; it appears endless. The \textit{Gazette} of the period is occupied for a year and a half with descriptions of Federalist celebrations. The famous portrait appears unfailingly, pulled along by generals, by ladies, by the \textit{pares} of Federalists, in a carriage made especially for the purpose. “Et le peuple, enchanté d’un tel spectacle, enthousiasmé du Te Deum, chanté mout bien à Notre-Dame, le peuple oublie qu’il payait fort cher tout, et se retirait fort joyeux.”

*Sarmiento displays his erudition by quoting a French history of the Middle Ages, \textit{Chronique du moyen âge}: “And, enchanted by such a spectacle, thrilled by the Te Deum sung very well in Notre Dame, the people forget that they have paid dearly for everything, and they went away quite happy.”

Making Sense of Caudillos and “Revolutions”

After a year and a half of celebrations, the color red emerges as the insignia of loyalty to “the cause.” The portrait of Rosas first graces church altars and then becomes part of the personal effects of each and every man, who must wear it on his chest as a sign of “intense personal attachment” to the Restorer. Last, out of these celebrations comes the terrible Mazorca, the corps of amateur Federalist police, whose designated function is, first, to administer enemas of pepper and turpentine to dissenters, and then, should this phlogistic treatment prove insufficient, to slit the throat of whomever they are told.

All America has scoffed at these famous celebrations of Buenos Aires and looked at them as the maximum degradation of a people; but I see in them nothing but a political strategy, and an extremely effective one. How does one teach the idea of personalist government to a republic which has never had a king? The red ribbon is a token of the terror which goes with you everywhere, in the street, in the bosom of the family; you must think of it when dressing and undressing. We remember things always by association; the sight of a tree in a field reminds us of what we were talking about as we walked under it ten years ago. Imagine what ideas the red ribbon brings with it by association, the indelible impressions it must have joined to the image of Rosas.

The story of the red ribbon is, indeed, curious. At first, it was an emblem adopted by enthusiasts; then they ordered everyone to wear it in order “to prove the unanimity” of public opinion. People meant to obey, but frequently forgot when they changed clothes. The police helped jog people’s memories. The Mazorca patrolled the streets; they stood with whips at the church door when ladies were leaving Mass and applied the lash without pity. But there was still much which needed fixing. Did someone wear his ribbon carelessly tied?—The lash! A Unitarian!—Was someone’s ribbon too short?—The lash! A Unitarian!—Someone did not wear one at all?—Cut his throat! The reprobate!

The government’s solicitude for public education did not stop there. It was not sufficient to be a Federalist, nor to wear the ribbon; it was obligatory also to wear a picture of the illustrious Restorer over one’s heart, with the slogan “Death to the Savage, Filthy Unitarians.” Enough, you think, to conclude the job of debasing a civilized people, robbing them of all personal dignity? Ah! They were not yet well enough disciplined. One morning, on a street corner in Buenos Aires, there appeared a figure drawn on paper, with a ribbon half a yard long floating in the breeze. As soon as someone saw it, that person backed away in fright and spread the alarm. People ducked into the nearest store and came out with ribbons half a yard long floating in the breeze. Ten minutes later, the entire population was out in the street wearing ribbons half a yard long. Another day the figure reappeared with a slight
alteration in the ribbon. The maneuver repeated itself. If some young lady forgot to wear a red bow in her hair, the police supplied one free—and attached it with melted tar! That is how they have created uniformity of public opinion! Search the Argentine Republic for someone who does not firmly believe and maintain that he is a Federalist!

It has happened a thousand times: a citizen steps out his door and finds that the other side of the street has been swept. A moment later, he has had his own side swept. The man next door copies him, and in half an hour the whole street has been swept, everyone thinking it was an order from the police. A shopkeeper puts out a flag to attract people’s attention; his neighbor sees him and, fearing he will be accused of tardiness by the governor, he puts out his own. The people across the street put out a flag; everyone else on the street puts one out; other streets follow suit; and suddenly all Buenos Aires is bedecked with flags. The police become alarmed and inquire what happy news has been received by everyone but them. And these people of Buenos Aires are the same ones who trounced eleven thousand Englishmen in the streets and then sent five armies across the American continent to hunt Spanish!

Terror, you see, is a disease of the spirit which can become an epidemic like cholera, measles, or scarlet fever. No one is safe, in the end, from the contagion. Though you may work ten years at inoculating, not even those already vaccinated can resist in the end. Do not laugh, nations of Spanish America, when you witness such degradation! Look well, for you, too, are Spanish, and so the Inquisition taught Spain to be! This sickness we carry in our blood.

9. The Caudillo as Protagonist
Antonio López de Santa Anna

The autobiography of Antonio López de Santa Anna constitutes the histrionic self-dramatization of one of the most powerful men in nineteenth-century Mexico. The caudillo presents himself not as a decision maker or a power broker but as a vulnerable, introspective protagonist, the leading figure on a national stage. The modern reader may recall from the unmitigated vanity of this “leading man,” but Santa Anna’s self-absorption seems not to have disqualified him in the eyes of his audience. When the excerpt begins in the early 1840s, Santa Anna is about to become president of Mexico for the fourth time.