

WHEN THE 'HELPLESS' HELP THEMSELVES: PETITIONS OF WAR WIDOWS DURING THE POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD IN CÓRDOBA, ARGENTINA (1810-1860)

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In 1816 Argentina officially became independent. Unfortunately, four years later the government collapsed and fifty years of civil war resulted. Much has been written about the political history of the time, but not until recently have historians begun to study the social history. The little social history that does exist focuses on the experiences of men and generally ignores women. This study aims to begin to provide an understanding of how women's lives were impacted by war, specifically how widows sought government aid in a patriarchal society. After independence welfare that had been established during the late colonial period collapsed and was never replaced due to constant governmental changes caused by civil war. The one way people were able to seek assistance and communicate with their government was to petition. Petitions are formal letters written to an authority figure in order to seek assistance or reverse injustice. This study examines the petitions of widows and the types of requests and arguments they made. The analysis demonstrates that although these women clung to traditional Spanish morality, gender roles, and societal structure, they proved very capable of helping themselves and understanding and utilizing the few laws that did exist.