

When the Helpless Help Themselves: Petitions of War Widows during the Post-Independence Period in Córdoba, Argentina (1810-1860)



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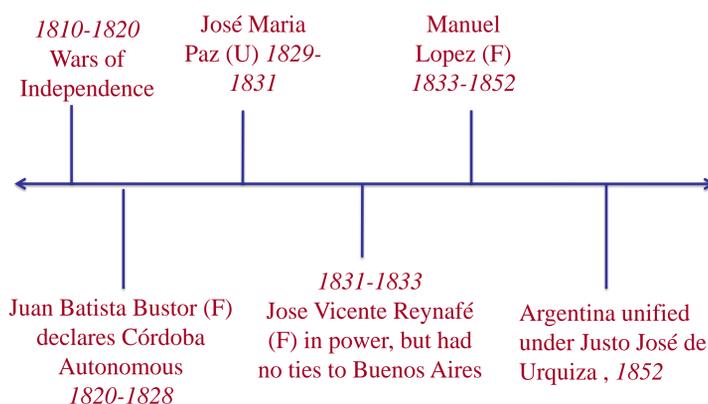
Introduction:

In 1816 Argentina officially became independent from Spanish colonial rule. Unfortunately, for the people of Argentina the fight for freedom was long from over. They faced fifty years of ideological struggle over who should run the young nation and how it should be governed.

War became a way of life for the citizens of the country, but little has been written about the survival strategies of the province's inhabitants. This project interprets how widows experienced war through the petitions they wrote to the government. Specifically, it aims to understand how they sought assistance and provided for themselves in a society dominated by patriarchal values.

Córdoba in a Time of War:

After Independence political turmoil resulted over how the country should be run as Federalists (F) sought strong provincial power and Unitarians (U) fought for a strong central government



Methods:

- Study petitions written to provincial governors from 1810-1860
- Organize petitions into a database that examines author, social status, request and petition outcome
- Examine petitions submitted by widows (76 petitions)



What Claims did Widows Make in their Petitions?

•Claims of sacrifice

- Husbands had died for the cause
- Local armies took their possessions

•Claims to patriarchal protection

- Gender roles

"[please consider] the sad helplessness that you see a poor widow"
-Comasa Mayorga, 1835

•Las Siete Partidas (medieval law code)

- Ruler seen as patriarch of society

"The king understands that they [widows] have greatly fallen from the condition in which they were accustomed to live"
- Las Siete Partidas, "on what good kings do"

•Claims of being protected by the law

•Recruitment Laws

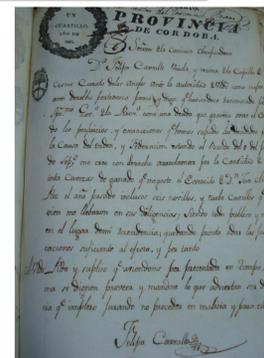
- Claimed that that policies to only recruit vagrants had been violated and that theirs sons were unjustly recruited

•Exemption laws

- Their sons were good men that cared for their mothers and therefore could not be recruited

"The laws dispensed to the widows like me serve to exempt from service my son, Dionicio"
-Juana Maria Luduena, 1834

Buenos Aires is the Capital of Argentina. In the years after independence Buenos Aires tried to exert power over the interior provinces, such as Córdoba. This led to civil war.

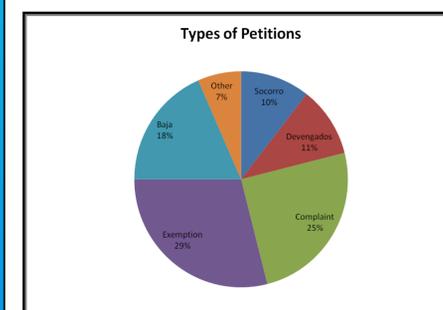


Petitions were generally written in the same format, regardless of the request.

What do Widows' Petitions Tell us about Women's politics?

- Though widows portrayed themselves as helpless, they used petitions effectively to protect themselves in a time of war
- Petitions became a tool to explain why widows were worthy of assistance
- Their references to the law explains their understanding of how the government could be used on their behalf
- The number of widows' petitions found over the years shows they found this to be an effective way to limit the impact of war on their families.

Widows Wrote Five Main Types of Petitions



- Socorro and devengados petitions sought money or other types of aid
- Complaint petitions generally were to claim stolen property
- Exemption and baja petitions were requests to exclude loved ones from military service.

Women's Petitions and Class

A widow's social class often determined the type of request she made. This suggest that social class could determine how women experienced war

- Wealthier women's petitions most often:
 - Asked for repayment of stolen material goods
 - Sought exemptions
 - Or were just complaints
- Poorer women's petitions most often:
 - Requested money or some other form of aid
 - Sought leave from the military for their sons

Acknowledgements:

I would like thank the Undergraduate Research Program for funding my research, the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater History Department for providing me with a place to work, my mentor Dr. Seth Meisel for all his help and guidance and my terrific archive and travel companions, John and Dessa.