

Chapter One

Prelude to Nationhood

Argentina's path to nationhood begins with Spanish conquest and colonization. To trace this path, I begin by looking at problems in nation formation throughout the American continent. Later, I examine specific elements of Argentina's prenatal experience as they set the stage for subsequent developments.

During the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, no concept engaged the European mind more than the idea of nationhood. With the waning of the Enlightenment and the advent of Romanticism, notions of universal brotherhood gave way to an upsurge of nationalist sentiment in which each country affirmed its ethnic, linguistic, and mythical uniqueness. Folk traditions, peasant life, religious festivals, national histories and heroes, ethnic idiosyncracies, tribal mythologies, and country landscapes soon permeated all the arts, from the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott and Alexandre Dumas; to the music of Dvorak, Wagner, and Tchaikovsky; to the paintings of Goya, Turner, and David; to the poetry of Schiller, Burns, and Becquer. National mythologies were resurrected when available, created when not, and spread with evangelical zeal, all with the effect of building a sense of national belongingness and destiny; these mythologies became the guiding fictions of nations, guiding fictions that encouraged the French to feel French; the English, English; and the Germans, German. When politicians sought to unite people under a common banner or to legitimate a particular government, appeals to the guiding fictions of preexisting peoplehood and national destiny proved enor-

mously useful; indeed, without them, the work of men like Bismarck, Gladstone, and Cavour toward national consolidation would have been more difficult and perhaps impossible.

Although a new country, the United States from the outset also had its guiding fictions, particularly in the Puritan dream of establishing a New Jerusalem in the American wilderness. As Ralph Perry, Sacvan Bercovitch, and others have shown, the name of their dream was "America," a name, although intended for an entire continent, which the Puritans took for their own. Even now, common usage the world over employs the names *America* and *Americans* as synonyms for the United States and its citizens, a practice that ignores the fact that all inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere are also Americans living in America. The Puritans defined themselves from the beginning as a nation apart, divinely chosen to exemplary righteousness and prosperity. They viewed themselves as modern Israelites called by God to occupy a promised land; more than a social goal, their work was a holy errand to establish Zion in the New World and be a light unto the iniquitous nations of the Old. The Puritan dream proved a highly adaptable guiding fiction that subsequent generations of Americans transformed into concepts such as manifest destiny and protector of the free world as well as the notion that the United States, more than other nations, should aspire to a higher standard of morality, a standard still invoked by people as diverse as moral majoritarians and civil rights leaders.

Among the Spanish American countries, such guiding fictions for individual nations were harder to come by. Whereas in Europe and to some degree in the United States, myths of peoplehood on which nations could be built were available before the nations themselves were formed, in Spanish America, civil strife following Independence forced nations to emerge in areas that had no guiding fictions for autonomous nationhood. The process of concept preceding political reality found in the United States and much of Europe was in large measure reversed; guiding fictions of national destiny had to be improvised after political independence was already a fact. The Spanish colonies were carefully designed to extend the Spanish Empire, to be culturally, economically, and politically dependent on their mother country. They were not intended to develop a unique and independent sense of nationhood, but to

be extensions of Spain, unquestioning in political loyalty, religious faith, and taxes. Moreover, few, if any, of the Spanish American colonists dreamed of a destiny other than that assigned by Spain.

To ensure Spain's hegemony over her American possessions, the Spanish colonies were governed for nearly 300 years by a highly centralized, albeit cumbersome, bureaucracy in which all important political and ecclesiastical positions were held by appointees from the mother country. Although the colonists and their descendants, known as *Creoles* (*criollos*), often disregarded political decrees from above, they seldom questioned the authority of the crown and its appointees on ideological grounds. Their attitude toward the monarchy is well described in the contradictory slogan, *Obedezco mas no cumpla*, "I obey but do not comply," which might also be freely rendered as "I recognize the crown's authority, but on a given issue will do whatever I want." Thus the Creoles could and often did act independently of imperial decrees, but theirs was the liberty of tolerated disobedience in a loosely administered society; it was not the liberty of embryonic nations yearning for independence from the Spanish monarchy.

Because of the rigid social, political, and ideological ties between Spain and her New World colonies, ideas of national uniqueness in Spanish America do not begin emerging until the last years of the eighteenth century, just prior to the independence movements of 1810–1826. Although toponyms like Mexico, Peru, and Chile date from the first years of the conquest, such terms before Independence never connoted a unique national destiny and eventual autonomy as was the case with "America" in the United States. Further, since the independence movement in Spanish America stemmed in large measure from the political collapse of the Spanish monarchy and Napoleon's invasion of the Iberian peninsula in 1808, separation from Spain was in a sense imposed by events from without. Nation formation was further complicated by civil wars in post-Independence Spanish America which eventually broke four viceroyalties into eighteen separate republics. As a result, what had been merely geographic areas of the Spanish Empire suddenly had to understand and define their destiny as autonomous units; they had to create guiding fictions of peoplehood and nationness in order to approach the ideological consensus that underlay stable societies in other parts of the

world. Thus were created new countries with new boundaries and freshly minted names like Venezuela, Guatemala, Colombia, Bolivia, and Argentina; no one in those areas a century or even a half-century before Independence dreamed that some day they would be new and distinct nations set apart by a unique destiny. Moreover, in none of those areas did a ready-made myth of national identity unite their inhabitants under a common ideology.

Yet, despite the administrative centralization and the lack of pre-Independence national ideologies, individual areas in Spanish America developed, on a popular level at least, a cultural uniqueness that the ruling classes before and after Independence often failed to appreciate. The Spaniards' goals of cultural and political uniformity were undermined to a remarkable degree by the mysterious, brazenly different, endlessly varied world they dared claim as theirs. From the day Columbus first attempted to understand and describe his discoveries and experiences, the unfamiliar lands interjected themselves into his consciousness and discourse, leaving him transformed and in a sense conquered. He and the conquistadors, missionaries, and settlers who followed him inevitably became partial products of the New World. Nature was the first intrusion into Spain's dream of replicating herself in America. The natural forces of exotic landscapes, tangled jungles, formidable mountains, vast pampas, untold natural wealth, and strange wildlife affected the course of conquest and settlement just as surely as any preconceived notion of empire building.

An even more important intrusion than the land in the Spanish dream of self-replication came from the native Americans, particularly the advanced Indian civilizations of Mexico and Peru. Cultural and sexual intermingling between conquerors and native Americans soon created regional cultural identities distinct from Spain as well as from one another. This blending of native and European cultures was encouraged by the Catholic missionaries, who, rather than totally destroying Indian religion, often tried to transform it by assigning Christian meanings to traditional religious symbols and celebrations—a practice motivated in part by the belief among some missionaries that the Indians were degenerate descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. Because of this cultural mixing, the Creoles soon developed a prenatal cultural uniqueness reflected in food, music, dress, dialect, folk traditions, and

religious festivals that varied from region to region. Further, given the varying degrees of miscegenation among Spaniards, Africans, and different groups of Indians, each area of the Spanish Empire produced a peculiar racial mix and phenotype, so much so that early in the colonial period Caribbeans were distinguishable from Meso-Americans, and Andeans from inhabitants of the Southern Cone. Even the ruling classes, despite their stubborn claims to racial purity, were more often than not products of some racial blending. *White* and *European* became relative terms, better for maintaining power and keeping family secrets than for describing factual genetic heritage.

With rigid government control on the one hand and fecund popular culture on the other, national, or at least regional, awareness among the Creoles developed in two contrary directions. The ruling classes were groomed in an atmosphere where success and refinement were marked by parroting attitudes received from Spain, in being more Spanish than the Spanish. As a result, high culture in colonial times was in large measure imitative and sterile—with, of course, notable exceptions such as the seventeenth-century Mexican poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Even after separating from Spain, the Spanish American elite would remain more attuned to the latest fads from Europe than to the popular culture that was uniquely theirs, and regional distinctiveness that could have formed the basis for national identity went largely ignored. With few exceptions, it was not until the twentieth century that Spanish American intellectuals began considering the guiding fictions of national identity, peoplehood, and destiny in terms of their own popular culture.

Where government by the intellectual and citified elite failed, the common people produced their own inchoate systems of government. Region by region among the lower classes, there developed enduring folk traditions, vague but powerful sentiments of class and ethnic solidarity, popular religion and prenational mythologies which created throughout Spanish America a strong sense of peoplehood and localness, or *localismo*. The political reflection of localism was government by a charismatic individual, or *caudillo*, rather than an institution, who somehow embodies cultural folk values. In personalist government, the caudillo becomes a visible symbol of authority and protection who on a smaller scale is

not unlike the patriarchal symbols of king and priest with which the popular masses were already familiar. In a choice between abstract theories of government and the caudillo, the masses felt more comfortable with their caudillos, who, however primitive and ruthless their methods, were more sensitive to the fears and desires of the rural masses than the centralist elite. As a result, in the figure of the caudillo, *localism* combined with *personalism*. These two impulses would bedevil elitist approaches to government for decades to come. Indeed, much of the civil strife following Independence can be directly traced to conflicts between localist caudillos and the grand, utopian dreams of the city-dwelling elite.

Because of this unusual disjuncture between derivative high culture and luxuriant, albeit chaotic, popular culture, the Spanish American colonies came to the independence movement of 1810 ideologically ill-prepared for the task of nation-building. The more utopian thinkers of the continent dreamed grandly of establishing a Pan-American state that would encompass the entire continent. More practical people like Simón Bolívar hoped for four or five sizable countries based roughly on the boundaries of the Spanish viceroyalties, as he indicates in his celebrated "Letter to a Jamaican Gentleman" (Bolívar *Obras completas* 1:159-175). Such dreams, however, never materialized: no sooner had the Spanish been defeated than civil wars broke out among the Creoles themselves. Strife among contentious factions in the elite, among rival caudillos, and between opposing provinces engulfed the continent, making institutional government impossible. With no central power, the caudillos were often the only source of order in the embryonic nations, perhaps because their authoritarian, personalist rule embodied folk values while reflecting in miniature the king-centered government of colonial times. But few of the caudillos conceived of nation-building on a grand scale. As a result, Spanish America became increasingly fragmented along both regional and social boundaries. Some of these divisions became permanent: Uruguay and Paraguay separated from Argentina, and what logically would have been one country in Central America became seven. The bickering and threat of anarchy produced a situation in which only strongmen with private armies appeared able to survive. Shortly before dying, Simón Bolívar viewed the mayhem around him and lamented, "We have ploughed the sea."

Faced with the failure of Pan-Americanist visions and the likely possibility of even more splintering, Spanish American thinkers of the mid-nineteenth century devoted much attention to understanding why the first post-Independence governments did not succeed and to creating more realistic plans for the future. That is to say, after the bloody chaos that followed the Wars of Independence, intellectuals throughout the continent set about the crucial task of creating guiding fictions, myths of national identity and peoplehood, that could heal broken countries and perhaps reduce the tendency for further fragmentation.

In the case of Argentina, the country's very name reflects the area's development from colony to country, from imperial territory to nation, for the name *Argentina* had a slow, uncertain evolution, not unlike that of the country itself. In 1514, one year after Balboa discovered the Pacific, Juan Díaz de Solís was commissioned by the Spanish crown to search the coast of South America for a river passage connecting the two oceans. A year later, Solís entered the immense estuary separating what is now Argentina and Uruguay, only to be killed by Indians who, feigning friendship, wooed him and some of his crew to shore. Later explorers, believing that the estuary led to the silver-rich areas of Upper Peru, now Bolivia, renamed it the River of Silver, "El Río de la Plata." From the Spanish word *plata*, meaning silver, comes the English corruption, the River Plate. The name *Argentina* preserves the association with silver in that it derives from *argentum*, the Latin term for silver (Rosenblat, *Argentina, historia de un nombre* 13–18). Popularized in a 1602 poem by Martín del Barco Centenera, the term *Argentina* became an obligatory substitute for *rioplatense* in poetic usage, and acquired a permanent place in patriotic occasional verse in the neoclassic poetry of Vicente López y Planes, famous for his 1807 "El Triunfo Argentino," a celebration of Buenos Aires' victory over a British invasion. Later, in his "Himno Nacional Argentino," the term received some official standing, although it was not until the constitution of 1826, sixteen years after the country rebelled against Spain, that "República Argentina" actually became the official name of the nation (Rosenblat 50–51).

The late emergence of the country's name derives from a simple fact: until Independence, the Argentine was merely an area of the

Spanish Empire, neither a country nor even an idea for a country. Moreover, the Spaniards for 250 years saw no reason to define any of the Southern Cone as a separate political entity, partly because they failed to recognize the area's potential as an autonomous unit. Unlike mineral-rich Mexico and Peru, where the Spaniards built prosperous viceroyalties on the foundations of highly developed Indian civilizations, the Argentine possessed neither gold nor silver, and its mostly nomadic natives preferred exile or death to the virtual serfdom of the Spanish *encomienda*, a neat arrangement by which Indians were forced to work for Spaniards in exchange for European civilization, Christianity, and "protection." The Spanish also failed to appreciate Argentina's greatest resource, the vast pampas that arguably constitute the richest agricultural area in the world. Indeed, had it not been for the Spanish drive to rule and Catholicize the entire continent, much of Argentina might have been forgotten altogether. The term *Argentina*, then, labels a paradox: the country was named for silver, a mineral it did not have while what it had in rich abundance—a huge agricultural potential—passed unrecognized for nearly three centuries.

Given Argentina's perceived lack of promise, early Spanish colonization in the Southern Cone was predictably sporadic and weak. Muddy settlements grew along trade routes established for the transport and refining of Bolivian silver. Since Argentine Indians were less sedentary than those of Mexico and Peru, the colonial pattern of building on preexisting civilizations broke down in most of Argentina. The area produced some tradable goods—livestock, raw cotton, and grain—which were exchanged for imports from Spain, mostly household items, clothing, and weapons. Labor was provided by Indians and a few African slaves bought from the Portuguese. Buenos Aires grew more slowly than did other colonial towns, partly because of a chronic shortage of labor and the distance separating the port settlement from the colonial economic centers in Upper Peru. The distance, however, helped give Buenos Aires a special character in that a large portion of its population was not Spanish but Portuguese (Rock, *Argentina* 4–6, 23–28). Until 1776 the monarchy insisted that Lima, the headquarters of the Viceroyalty of Peru, be the political and economic center of the entire area. Even trade routes between Spain and Buenos Aires had to pass through Lima, following a circuitous path that led over

mud-obstructed trails from Buenos Aires through the Andes to Lima to ports on the northern coast of South America and eventually to Spain. The obvious possibility of establishing ports along the Argentine coast was unacceptable to the Spanish and their Buenos Aires intermediaries who were solely interested in maintaining their mercantilist monopoly. Contact between Spain and the colonies was further restricted by the crown's decision to limit trade voyages to the New World to two per year, a choice prompted by the need to ship colonial goods in large armed convoys, or *flotas*, as a defense against raiders like Sir Francis Drake (Gibson, *Spain in America* 102). Funneling everything through Lima was also viewed by Spain's Counter-Reformation hierarchy as a way of limiting the spread of heretical ideas to the colonies.

The commercial potential of Buenos Aires, however, was not lost on traders and smugglers, primarily British and Dutch, who regularly violated Spanish mercantilist law by establishing business contacts with the *porteños*, as people of the port city of Buenos Aires became known. As Germán and Alicia Tjarks have shown, by the late eighteenth century, porteño merchants were selling Bolivian silver, salted meat, cowhide, and handicrafts to non-Spanish traders, making a healthy profit for themselves while evading royal export taxes. Buenos Aires also became an important center of the slave trade as the Portuguese brought in Africans in increasing numbers to meet the labor needs of the growing economy (Rock, *Argentina* 40–49). Because of these contacts, Buenos Aires prospered during the late 1700s and soon took on a European flavor that both titillated and disturbed conservative Spanish appointees and traditionalist Creoles.

Argentina, then, at the end of the colonial period was mostly empty, with an estimated population of some 500,000 in a land as large as the eastern half of the United States. In principle the region was under Spanish rule, but in practice the distances meant little real contact with the Metropolis. In no sense was the area unified by geography, politics, economics, or a particular vision of national destiny. What cities existed were in reality isolated towns and missions connected by poor or nonexistent roads and dreadfully slow land travel. In the west were the small, dusty settlements of Mendoza and San Juan, both in the foothills of the Andes and more closely linked to Chile than to Buenos Aires. To the north

were Tucumán, Salta, and Jujuy, culturally closer to the Spanish-Indian cultures of Peru than to the rest of what would later become Argentina. Near the middle was Córdoba, a busy center of political conservatism, scholastic education, and religious fervor. In the northeast were Uruguay and Paraguay, soon to separate from the Argentine. Along the Paraná River, which runs north from the River Plate estuary, in a rich agricultural area commonly called the *Littoral*, were the small settlements of Santa Fe and Paraná. And at the mouth of the great estuary was Buenos Aires, geographically and culturally distant from the rest of Argentina, but destined by its privileged location between the rich pampas and the ocean trade routes to exercise a peculiar hegemony over the interior provinces. Unlike the United States, where easy river travel greatly facilitated contact between coastal and interior cities, Argentine settlements, except those along the Littoral, were connected only by slow overland travel; journeying the some 750 miles between Tucumán and Buenos Aires, for example, took an average of two months. Consequently, Argentine cities and provinces developed in relative isolation, a fact that nourished localist sentiment and loyalties.

Localist sentiment also grew as a result of the colonial political system. Initially, in all of Spanish America there were only two viceroyalties, one headquartered in Mexico City and the other in Lima, Peru. Under each viceroyalty were regional political centers, or *audiencias*, which mediated affairs between the towns and the viceroy. Reporting to the audiencias from each major settlement was the *cabildo*, one of the most enduring political institutions of the colonial period. The cabildos were town councils consisting partially of outside appointees but mostly of *regidores*, or councilors, chosen from native-born or long-term residents deeply rooted in local life. Although Spanish jurists laid out in numbing detail the proper relationships between the crown, the viceroy, the audiencia, and the cabildo, the isolated settlements in the Southern Cone could hardly sustain such organizational complexity. In theory, the cabildos were under the jurisdiction of the audiencia, the viceroy, and eventually the crown; in practice, however, this huge bureaucracy seldom affected the cabildos in outlying areas like the Argentine, and the cabildos became the only real governments, jealously guarding their role as protectors of localist traditions and prerogatives. Since they consisted mainly of wealthy citizens elected by

other cabildo members rather than by the general populace, they were not democratic in any strict sense of the term; still, the cabildos undoubtedly understood the concerns of their fellow townspeople to a degree unlikely in an outsider. Moreover, although the cabildos were under the control of the local elites, an old-fashioned noblesse oblige probably made their members more sensitive to the needs of the poor than the dog-eat-dog economics that after Independence would ravish the Argentine interior. Twentieth-century Argentine historians do not agree on the role of the cabildos. "Liberal" historians like José Ingenieros call them "the birthplace of a municipal oligarchical spirit" and the "antithesis" of democracy (Ingenieros, *La evolución de las ideas argentinas* 1:32-33). In contrast, "revisionist" historians, pro-Hispanic nationalists like Julio Irazusta in the main, argue that the cabildos were essentially democratic institutions that predated Enlightenment political theory (Irazusta, *Breve historia* 26-27, 51-54).

Given their localist feelings, the cabildos were early recognized as obstacles to centralized rule. For this reason, during the eighteenth century, the reformist Bourbon kings created an intermediate administrative layer, the *intendencias*, to oversee and limit the power of the cabildos. Again, after the Wars of Independence, the porteño leader, Bernardino Rivadavia, dissolved the cabildos of Buenos Aires and Luján in an attempt to limit local authority. Yet, whether the cabildos existed officially or not, the impulse toward local, autonomist government did not die easily. Without the cabildos, local rule fell into the hands of caudillos, local chieftains and petty dictators who, for all their arbitrariness, enjoyed such loyalty from fellow provincials that Argentine historian José Luis Romero refers to their rule as an "inorganic democracy" (*Las ideas políticas en Argentina* 98-128).

Underpinning the caudillos' rule was another culture, that of the peasants (*campesinos*), or gauchos, which developed in the vast plains and hills separating the settlements of Argentina. The exact nature of Argentina's rural population during colonial times has engendered a raucous, interminable debate between "nationalists" who view the campesinos or gauchos as a repository of authentic Argentine values and "liberals" who see them as untutored masses easily manipulated by demagogues. Both positions (studied in detail in later chapters) overlook the complexity of the rural, lower-

class population. The campesinos consisted of several groups, all interrelated and all in a state of flux. Some were nomadic, some were peons in the employ of an estanciero, some were bandits and smugglers, and many were all of these at one time or another. In its purest sense, *gaucho* referred to the nomadic, often outlaw inhabitants of the great plains of Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. In current usage, *gaucho* usually designates the rural working class in general.

The gauchos (like the rural population generally) stemmed from the three ethnic roots: Spanish, Indian, and African. They roamed freely over the pampas, lived easily off a bountiful land, captured and rode wild horses, drank abundantly, gambled, smuggled, robbed, fought, hunted wild cattle, sold cowhide to purchase what little they needed, ate mostly beef, sang improvised ballads celebrating their heroics and loves, and lived in free unions seldom consecrated by the sacrament of holy matrimony. In short, they were superstitious, filthy, unlettered, and happy. While the gauchos left no records of themselves, many colonial chroniclers refer to them (see Rodríguez Molas, *Historia social del gaucho*, chaps. 1–3). Of these, one of the most entertaining is by Concolorcorvo, the pseudonym for a Spanish postal inspector, whose description of the gauchos' "crude and course ways" seems vaguely charged with envy (Concolorcorvo, "An Unflattering Glimpse of the Gauchos" 57). So attractive were the gauchos' carefree ways that in 1807, during the British occupation of Buenos Aires, 170 English soldiers deserted to live among them. Complained General Whitelocke, "The more the soldiers became acquainted with the plenty the Country affords and the easy means of acquiring it, the greater . . . the evil" (cited in Ferns, *Britain and Argentina in the Nineteenth Century* 57).

Such then was Argentina during the last half of the 1700s: a land of isolated settlements, autonomist townsmen, nomad gauchos, relatively docile employees of estancieros, unconquered Indians, minimal economic and political development—and no sense of national destiny. In this context, the foundations of Argentine nationhood were laid on July 4, 1776, when the Spanish monarch, Charles III, finally bowed to century-old economic pressures and created The Viceroyalty of the River Plate with headquarters in Buenos Aires, which by this time had grown from a swampy settle-

ment lost on the edge of the unending pampas to a city of some 25,000 people and a thriving center of trade—much of it illegal. The throne's primary motive in creating the new viceroyalty was to exert, through a policy ironically named *libre comercio*, or "free trade," greater control on the area's eastward trade, particularly in Bolivian silver bullion that had existed illegally for nearly a half-century. Clever Buenos Aires merchants were quick to establish exclusive contracts with Spanish mercantile monopolies, thus forming the basis for some of Argentina's most enduring private fortunes. In addition to bullion, their primary exports were salted meat and cowhide, a product of prime industrial importance before the discovery of rubber. *Libre comercio* brought relative prosperity to River Plate traders except during periods of disruption provoked by Spain's repeated conflicts with Great Britain (Rock, *Argentina* 66–72).

The new viceroyalty included most of what is now Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina, and constituted the first step in establishing a new nation—although no one at the time thought in those terms. The king granted to Buenos Aires the authority to collect customs taxes in the new viceroyalty, a privilege the port city would guard jealously, creating between porteños and provincials the same resentments Buenos Aires had previously felt toward Lima. Distrust of the port city grew as Buenos Aires, reflecting its own localism, increasingly aspired to control the interior. Under the new viceroy, the provincial cabildos were increasingly pressured to follow Buenos Aires, often at the expense of local prerogatives. Moreover, Buenos Aires, through control of customs regulations, interjected itself with growing frequency into the financial affairs of the interior. Faced with Buenos Aires' encroachment on local autonomy and usurpation of profits through the customs tax, provincials came to fear the new hegemony from the porteños; their fears would provide the foundation for nearly fifty years of civil wars beginning soon after the Wars of Independence.

Intellectual life in the new viceroyalty, as in the colonies generally, was severely limited by policy as well as by geographic isolation. In the mostly illiterate society, knowing how to read and write was a marketable skill, so much so that "secretaries" for the caudillos often wielded considerable power. The Church controlled all schools, giving students an authoritarian, scholastic education

that emphasized rote memorization of received truth while attacking or disregarding the empirical and rational epistemologies that had already caused profound changes in Europe. On an unofficial level, however, there was more intellectual freedom than popular notions of Counter-Reformation Catholicism might allow. The higher officers of the Inquisition did issue edict after edict demanding that incoming books, bookstore stocks, and private libraries be regularly scrutinized by the Holy Office. Yet, as Irving A. Leonard reports, the efforts of the inquisitors were frequently honored more in the breach than in the observance thanks to extensive smuggling of heretical works, often with the collaboration of lower Inquisition officials and members of religious communities. Similarly, although Creole writers were forbidden to write or publish except on noncontroversial matters of purely local concern, unapproved editions of local and foreign works appeared regularly during the colonial period (Leonard, *Baroque Times in Old Mexico* 166–182; *Books of the Brave* 157–171). After the successful revolutions in the United States and France, prorevolutionary texts, often written by Spanish priests, circulated throughout the colonies, despite vigorous attempts at censorship and refutation by conservative clerics (Ruiz-Guiñazú, *Saavedra* 121–145).

In Argentina intellectual life was even less developed than in major colonial centers like Mexico City and Lima. In 1776, the year the new viceroyalty was founded, there were only six primary schools in Córdoba and four in Buenos Aires, all associated with the Church. Virtually all women were denied access to schools since reading and writing were seen in a woman as “items that lead only to sin or to the temptation to flee from the vigilance of her parents” (López, *Historia de la República Argentina* 1:243). The two secondary schools in Buenos Aires, El Colegio de San Carlos and El Colegio del Rey, were staffed mostly by priests limited by both training and inclination. In the words of Manuel Moreno, who attended El Colegio de San Carlos in Buenos Aires during the 1780s, the teacher priests all but starved students while imparting little knowledge worth living. They were, in his words, “intolerant theologians who spend their time rehashing and defending abstract questions about the divine nature, angels, etc., while consuming their lives in discussing opinions of ancient authors who established extravagant and arbitrary systems about things no one is capable of

knowing." In his view, even those few priests who tried to teach natural sciences were severely limited since "they cannot impart to their disciples what they themselves do not know." He further claims that the monastic teaching orders were much more interested in furthering their material well-being than in educating Creole youngsters (Moreno [Manuel], "Vida," in *Memorias y Autobiografías* 2:16–22).

Despite these limitations on intellectual life, the ideas of the Enlightenment seeped slowly into Argentina. The Bourbon kings, who ruled Spain from 1700 until the Napoleonic invasion in 1808, instituted reforms in Spanish-American society not unlike those of the enlightened despots in France (see Sánchez [Luis], *El pensamiento político*). Foreign thinking in the eighteenth century also influenced a new generation of Spanish rationalists, notably Benito Jerónimo Feijóo, a Benedictine monk, and Gaspar Melchor Jovellanos, a Spanish encyclopedist, whose works were avidly read all through the Hispanic world. In Argentina, the small, literate elite also read Montesquieu, Descartes, Locke, Voltaire, and Rousseau, but as in Spain, enlightened ideas broadened intellectual horizons without provoking outbursts of anticlericalism and subversion (Carbia, *La Revolución de Mayo y la Iglesia* 18–20). Consequently, as Charles Griffin has pointed out, the role of enlightened thought in the independence movement was more one of confirmation than of cause since 300 years of authoritarian rule and scholastic education left an indelible mark on Argentine thinking that would not wash out quickly.

Despite the relative compliance of most Spanish-American intellectuals during the colonial period, in the early 1800s independence from Spain became a popular topic in parlor conversation throughout the colonies and particularly in Buenos Aires, where many porteños had some reason to resent Spain: Creoles were excluded from important positions in both church and government, Charles IV's irresponsibility was an international scandal, and economic restrictions limiting trade with nations other than Spain and the colonies profoundly irritated those porteño merchants not holding contracts with the mercantilist monopolies in Spain. The porteño bourgeoisie was sharply divided between these two groups of "intermediary agents" who benefited from the closed contracts with Spain and those independent merchants who sought trade