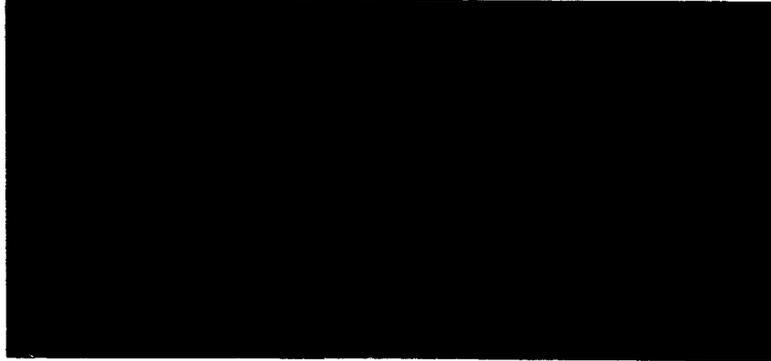




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WORLD MARKET, CLASS CONFLICT,
AND RURAL COERCION IN POST-COLONIAL
BUENOS AIRES

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**World Market, Class Conflict, and Rural Coercion in
Post-Colonial Buenos Aires ***

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After gaining independence from Spain in the 1810s, Argentina underwent dramatic changes in its relationship to the world economic system and in its internal class structure. Perhaps nowhere were these changes so clear as in the province of Buenos Aires. From an entrepot engaged primarily in exporting Bolivian silver to Spain and importing European luxury goods from Spain, Buenos Aires became a major producer and exporter of hides and other cattle products, which went primarily to industrializing Britain. From a society dominated by merchants and royal bureaucrats, Buenos Aires developed a class structure dominated by large-scale ranchers and reinforced by an intensification of coercive control over the rural population.

The association between peripheral status in the world system and coerced rural labor has been noted by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, pp. 87-119), although the exact causal processes leading from incorporation in the world economy as an exporter of staple commodities to increased rural coercion remain rather obscure in Wallerstein's work. Wallerstein appears to see a kind of automatic correspondence between world system position and degree of coercion, which, as Skocpol (1977) has pointed out, requires the assumption that the upper class can always get what it wants. Wallerstein's approach has also been challenged by Robert Brenner (1977), who asserts that landed upper classes are only able to expand production of export staples through increased coercion of rural labor where rural lower classes do not have the political, legal, and organizational resources necessary to stop them. Indeed, for Brenner, the rural lower classes may themselves take

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advantage of expanded opportunities for export production, and thereby strengthen their position relative to the upper classes (1977, pp. 69-70, 88-90).

Wallerstein also tends to treat what he calls "coerced cash-crop labor" as an undifferentiated phenomenon, although he does distinguish it from slavery. All of Latin America was peripheral to the world economy in the nineteenth century, but many different kinds of non-slave labor regime developed in the region (Duncan and Rutledge 1977; Bauer 1979). Most of these labor regimes did involve some kind of coercion, but the nature and degree of coercive controls varied widely, and an approach which generalizes about the effects of different positions in the world system does not contribute to an understanding of this variation.

This paper is an attempt to understand why certain specific forms of coercion developed in Buenos Aires after independence. The fact that expanded production of export staples after independence involved major changes in the economic activities of the dominant classes makes it easier to trace the effects of increased export production on rural class relations. Although Buenos Aires was connected to the world economy during the colonial period, the nature of its relationship to the world system changed decisively with independence. Wallerstein expects coerced labor to be most prevalent in the production of export staples, and it was the production of export staples that increased dramatically after independence in Buenos Aires and came to dominate the economic life of the province (Wallerstein 1974, p. 91). Prior to the shift toward cattle production, the rural lower classes of Buenos Aires were also relatively free compared to their counterparts elsewhere in Latin America, particularly those in the plantation and mining regions that were central to the Spanish colonial economy (Garavaglia 1987, pp.51-2; Mayo 1984; Mayo and Latrubesse de Diaz unpublished; Salvatori unpublished). The expansion of cattle production in Buenos Aires, therefore, led to an actual intensification of rural coercion rather than simply the perpetuation of pre-existing patterns.

The approach adopted here does not assume that the upper classes were automatically able to obtain the coercive system which was most convenient for them. In fact the forms of resistance available to the rural lower classes are treated here as central to the explanation of both the nature of coercive laws and the ways in which these laws were implemented. This paper will argue that readily available opportunities for autonomous economic activity in early nineteenth century Buenos Aires made extra-economic coercion of the rural population a necessity if the dominant classes of the province were to have a labor force and be able to take advantage of the new opportunities for export production. The combination of highly seasonal labor demand with a mobile and armed population led to a strategy of indirect extra-economic coercion, in which rural elites used selective enforcement of repressive laws to increase the dependence of the rural population on them for protection from the state. This strategy was only partially successful, however, and large ranchers obtained far less control over the rural population than they would have liked. Thus, although the world market presented an incentive for the dominant classes of Buenos Aires to intensify rural coercion, the nature of coercive measures and the degree to which they could be implemented were shaped by local struggles, not the world system.

Historical Background

Prior to independence, the city of Buenos Aires was the capital and principal port of the Rio de la Plata viceroyalty, which included the area comprising present day Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Bolivia. The predominant activities of the city were thus administration and trade. The most important Buenos Aires merchants were involved in exporting Bolivian silver to Spain and importing European luxury goods from Spain for shipment by oxcart and mule to the silver-producing areas of Upper Peru (Bolivia) and intermediate points. (Halperin 1975; Socolow 1978, pp. 54-6). Although the countryside of

Buenos Aires was well-suited for ranching, only a relatively narrow band of land along the Plate and Parana rivers was permanently occupied by Spaniards and most of the province was controlled by Amerindians (Halperín Donghi 1969b). In general, ranchers possessed much less wealth, power, and prestige than the import-export merchants of the city (Azara 1943, p. 7; Halperin 1969a, pp. 43-5; Socolow 1978, p. 65). Ranching expanded somewhat in the later years of the viceroyalty, due to the growing markets for hides in Europe and for salted meat in Brazil and Cuba, combined with intermittent Spanish permission to engage in direct trade with other European countries. Livestock products came to account for about a third of the value of the exports of Buenos Aires by the end of the colonial era (Halperín Donghi 1969a, p. 28).

Independence brought the end of Spanish restrictions on trade and direct access to the market for hides of industrializing and war-making Western Europe, particularly that of Great Britain, which provided a strong stimulus to Argentine cattle production. At the same time, the war of independence caused the collapse of the silver trade when Buenos Aires was cut off from Upper Peru (Bolivia). Many English merchants also moved to Buenos Aires and came to dominate the import trade (Ferns 1970; Halperín Donghi 1975). The mercantile upper classes of Buenos Aires thus found their opportunities for trade greatly diminished at the same time that direct access to the world market provided opportunities for high rates of profit in cattle ranching, which increased dramatically after independence (Halperín Donghi 1969a). Post-independence governments responsive to the interests of large ranchers carried out various expeditions against the Indians that extended the frontier and increased the land area available for ranching (Halperín Donghi 1969b; Zimmerman 1945). The provincial government of the early 1820s and the short-lived national government of the mid 1820s also gave out vast expanses of public land under the emphyteusis system, which provided for long term leases at very low rates (Bagu 1966; Coni 1927; Carretero 1970). Analysis of emphyteusis claims indicates that a vastly disproportionate amount of this land was claimed by urban wholesale merchants

(Monsma unpublished). Despite the dramatic economic and political changes of the independence period the core of the large-scale ranching class which came to dominate the province in the 1820s was comprised of families who had been among the wealthiest merchant families of the colony (Ansaldi 1985; Galmarini 1974, pp. 31-40; Halperín Donghi 1975).

The Intensification of Rural Coercion

The expansion of ranching after independence was accompanied by a series of repressive laws and decrees affecting the rural lower classes. The core of this set of laws was legislation requiring rural residents who did not own income-producing property to carry a paper certifying that they were employed. Those found without this document were to be considered vagrants and drafted into the military. Rural inhabitants traveling outside of their home district were also required to carry a passport authorized by a Police Commissioner. Laws were passed banning the hunting of rheas (American ostriches) and restricting the hunting of other animals. Contact with the indians was severely limited, and rural general stores, or *pulperias*, were brought under strict regulation. Gambling and several traditional gaucho games were made illegal. Most of these laws had some kind of colonial antecedent, but the seriousness of enforcement efforts was unprecedented (Garavaglia 1987, pp. 51-2; Rodriguez Molas 1982, pp. 130, 137; Szuchman 1984, p. 85). Colonial vagrancy laws, in fact, seem to have been aimed more at the urban than the rural population and they were not used to restrict gaucho mobility until after independence (Salvatori unpublished, p. 13). To enforce these laws a system of rural Justices of the Peace and Police Commissioners was introduced to replace the colonial Alcaldes de Hermandad. The new system, which included local Alcaldes and Lieutenant Alcaldes answerable to the Justices of the Peace, and groups of armed men (*partidas de policia*) controlled by police commissioners, was supposed to allow closer surveillance of the

countryside and swift apprehension of delinquents (Diaz 1959; Halperín Donghi 1975, p. 353; Romay 1980, pp. 81-7, 135-9).

Like the vagrancy laws of eighteenth century Europe, the vagrancy laws and other restrictions on rural life in early nineteenth century Buenos Aires were partially intended to control crime and protect private property (Chambliss 1964; Foucault 1979; Thompson 1975). Livestock, the most important form of property in the province, was particularly vulnerable to theft. In Buenos Aires, however, these laws were also intended to force rural inhabitants to sell their labor. Labor shortage was a constant problem for large ranchers, and official discourse repeatedly identified vagrancy with absence of work and production (Brown 1979, pp. 187-90; Halperín Donghi 1969a, p. 49). A manual of instructions for Justices of the Peace referred to vagrants as "that class of men who produce nothing, who only live off the work of others, and are disposed to commit all types of crimes." (*Manual para los Jueces de Paz de Campana* 1825, p. 22) The introduction to an 1822 decree ordering the police to arrest vagrants and remit them for military service called them "non-productive, costly, damaging to public morale, and instigators of disturbances (*inquiétudes*) in the social order." This decree summarized the need for police action with the statement "vagabonds are becoming a true obstacle to the country's progress" (*Registro Oficial* (Buenos Aires) 1822, pp. 170-1). To almost all members of the political elite at this time "progress" meant the expansion of the ranching economy.

Why were coercive controls seen as necessary to ensure an adequate supply of ranch labor, and why did coercive efforts take the form that they did? The answers to these questions require some knowledge of the rural social world into which the merchants-turned-ranchers were entering, and of the nature of cattle production at this time. In addition to smaller ranchers with legally recognized land titles, the countryside abounded with small settlers who did not possess any kind of official title to the land they used. In colonial Buenos Aires, legal procedures for obtaining land titles required so much money

and influence that many small ranchers and farmers simply set up operations as squatters at appropriate locations on the vast plains (Azara 1943, pp. 13-4; Giberti 1970, pp. 45-8; Rodriguez Molas 1982). Colonial sources also indicate the presence of many small settlers using land belonging to large landholders with their permission. In exchange, these settlers, known as *agregados*, paid rent, provided labor services, or assured the limits of the landowner's property against encroachment by neighboring ranchers (Mayo 1987, p. 28; Amaral 1987, p. 35; Garavaglia 1987, pp. 45-6). With easy access to land, barriers to entry into ranching were low. Cattle, the largest initial expense of ranching, were cheap and multiplied naturally (Halperín Donghi 1969a, p. 35).

Squatting continued into the early national period and may have increased with the expansion of the frontier to the south (Garcia 1969, p. 22). Under the emphyteusis system of the 1820s, wealthy individuals claimed much land that was already occupied by squatters (Carretero 1974, pp. 97-8; Coni 1927, p. 46; Gonzalez Bernaldo 1987, pp. 144-5). The emphyteusis system does not seem to have severely restricted access to land, however, as many of these squatters were apparently turned into *agregados* or renters. The cattle brand registry maintained by the police indicates that, by 1830, large numbers of those with registered brands were using land possessed by others (*Coleccion general de las marcas del ganado de la Provincia de Buenos Aires* 1830). Land was a superabundant resource relative to other economic inputs, and the possession of large expanses of land did not allow the dominant classes of the province to monopolize cattle production or ensure the availability of an economically dependent labor force.

In addition to small-scale ranching and farming, a variety of other autonomous economic activities were available to the rural lower classes. These included charcoal making, the hunting of rheas for feathers and nutrias for pelts, and the slaughter of stray and stolen cattle, which provided both hides and food. Although some of these activities were carried out partly for subsistence, all of them also involved production for domestic or

international markets. The products were often sold to the owners of *pulperias*, who provided an avenue for commercialization of pampean products which was independent of the large ranchers (Brown 1979, pp.142-3; Halperín Donghi 1969a, pp. 48-9; Mayo 1987, p.27). Elite complaints about the non-productive nature of the rural lower classes thus seem to have been motivated more by the difficulty of finding reliable ranch peons than by an actual absence of productive activity on the part of rural inhabitants. In fact, the labor shortage was caused in part by the fact that the rural lower classes were already engaged in independent commodity production. Readily available opportunities for subsistence and petty commodity production meant that economic compulsion to work for others was particularly weak in early nineteenth century Buenos Aires. The ease of autonomous existence was accompanied by a culture of independence and disrespect for social hierarchy that made reliable ranch peons even more difficult to find (Mayo 1984; Mayo 1987; Salvatori and Brown 1987).

Not only was it easy for the rural lower classes to get by without selling their labor, but the nature of ranching at the time meant that it would have been difficult or impossible for large ranchers to offer economic incentives strong enough to ensure a dependable labor force as long as the rural lower classes had access to land. Economies of scale in ranching were such that small ranchers were just as productive as large ranchers in this era. The available evidence indicates that highly concentrated landholdings were not necessary or optimal for cattle production. The actual unit of production was considerably smaller than the unit of landholding, with large ranches divided into several smaller subbranches with separate herds and separate sets of peons attending them (Halperín 1969b, p. 66). There were technical limits to the size of the unit of production in this pre-fence era because herds above a certain size were difficult to tame and difficult to round up. It was also difficult to separate the stray cattle of neighbors from large herds (Lemée 1942, p.116). In a free labor market, as Brenner has noted, landlords cannot afford to pay workers who are able to produce the same commodities with an equal degree

of productivity by themselves. The producers would be better off working for themselves unless capitalists were willing to pay them the full value of their products, in which case the capitalists would be left without profits (Brenner 1986, p. 31). The beginnings of such a situation were already noticeable in Buenos Aires before independence. The Alcalde de Hermandad of Chascomus wrote in 1808 that his district was

...filled with vagrants and other individuals who, having a herd of mares and ten or twelve branded horses, already consider themselves ranchers (*hacendados*)... (T)he few animals they have graze on land that does not belong to them... (They) live off the cattle of others, live without any kind of subordination, do not dedicate themselves to any work with which they could earn a living... (O)ne sees the ranchers filled with anguish in their work because they cannot find any peons willing to work (*conchabarse*) (Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires 1914, p.193).

Settlers with small herds could always find time to work for others by leaving their animals and fields in the care of other family members, but the nature of ranching at this time meant that they had a strong incentive, other things being equal, to let the size of their herds increase and gradually withdraw from wage labor. The necessary land could be obtained easily enough through renting or through informal occupancy of frontier land. If large ranchers were to have workers, it was important that the rural lower classes be prevented from themselves taking advantage of the new opportunities for export production.

Why not simply require the rural lower classes to perform labor services for landowners? This solution would have encountered special problems in the ecological and social environment of rural Buenos Aires. The mobility of a population on horseback combined with the vastness of the plains and the ease of autonomous subsistence to facilitate escape, or "exit", from undesirable social circumstances (see Hirschman 1970). In his report to the revolutionary Junta after inspecting the countryside of Buenos Aires in 1811, Pedro Andrés Garcia noted the difficulty of controlling this population: "The wisest laws, the most rigorous police measures, will never work on a population dispersed over an immense countryside, and on families that can move their homes with the same facility as

Arabs or Pampas (Indians)" (1969, p. 23). Not only was there an open frontier, but the Indians on the other side of the frontier often welcomed refugees from Hispanic society (Mayo and Latrubesse de Diaz unpublished). Later on in the same report Garcia stated "(M)any of our country-folk, whose customs... are not very far from those of the savages, have become acquainted with them, and attracted by the desire to live a life of ease, or perhaps fearing punishment for their crimes, gladly settle among the Indians." (Garcia 1969, p. 35-36). Cattle production also required that peons work autonomously and be skilled in the use of dangerous weapons, which made direct coercion even more difficult.

Directly coerced labor in the form of slaves was often used on large ranches, where small numbers of slaves served as permanent, year-round workers (Albores et al. 1977; Amaral 1987a; Mayo 1987, p. 30). The bulk of ranch work, however, was concentrated in the seasonal tasks of roundup and branding, which occurred in the spring and the fall, and it would have been prohibitively expensive to buy and maintain slaves who were only used for a few months of the year (Amaral 1987a, pp. 261-3). In any case, slaves could easily escape in the frontier environment of Buenos Aires. Although ranch owners developed paternalistic relationships with the few slaves who worked on large ranches, the rural police filed many reports of runaway slaves during this period. Such paternalism might have broken down completely if slaves had been used as the bulk of the ranch labor force.

As I have shown above, both economic and direct extra-economic coercion of labor were not very feasible in rural Buenos Aires after independence. The coercive controls imposed on the rural population were therefore oriented toward restricting possibilities for autonomous existence and depressing the price of labor. Vagrancy laws put pressure on rural inhabitants to sell their labor. Passport requirements restricted mobility, thereby limiting possibilities for "exit" and restricting the operation of a free labor market. Restrictions on hunting penalized an important form of petty commodity production.

Restrictions on *pulperias* and on contact with the Indians were an attempt to control autonomous commercialization networks.

The prohibition of traditional forms of leisure is more mysterious. In an environment in which economic compulsion to work for others was weak, and in which one could get by with very little work at all, elites sometimes considered the simple availability of distractions a disincentive to work. This is clearly expressed in various prohibitions on horse races and attendance at general stores on workdays. Opposition to traditional games and amusements was often stronger than this, however. Rural elites sometimes associated traditional entertainments with extreme harm, as when the Alcalde de Hermandad of San Vicente called those who played card games in *pulperias* "vice-ridden malevolent perpetrators of death and robbery" who, if not controlled, would cause "the total ruin of our estates (*haciendas*)" (to Substitute Governor, August 29, 1820, in Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires (henceforth AGN) X-11-8-9 Comandantes y Alcaldes de Campaña, etc. 1820). Games and amusements allowed the formation of horizontal bonds among rural men, who lived and worked in isolation or in small groups. Most of these leisure time activities- drinking, gambling, story telling, horseracing, and other equestrian contests and games- took place in or around the *pulperias* (Rodriguez Molas 1982, p. 144; Slatta 1983, pp. 80-87). Elite discussions of these general stores centered on the violence and "disturbances" that took place there (Bossio 1972, pp. 65-96). Many such "disturbances" were simply fights between gamblers, but *pulperias* also became important centers of political agitation and organizing during times of rural unrest (Bossio 1972, pp. 86-91; González Bernaldo 1987, p. 149). It is therefore reasonable to think that the banning of gaucho entertainments and the stricter regulation of country stores were motivated in part by a desire to restrict the capacity of the rural population for collective action.

Coercive Controls in Action

On the surface, the coercive controls imposed on the rural population of Buenos Aires after independence were a straightforward attempt to control disorder and force rural men to sell their labor. The actual enforcement of these laws was more complex, however. They were vague enough that it would have been possible to define the majority of the rural population as vagrants or criminals. The seasonality of ranch work meant that most ranch workers were unemployed for much of the year and that "vagrants" and ranch peons were often the same people (Mayo 1984, p. 616). Large ranchers thus did not want the complete elimination of opportunities for autonomous subsistence. Overly zealous rural authorities who tried to enforce the letter of the law found themselves frustrated by the obstruction of prominent citizens and the tendency of many ranchers to let the poor settle on their land (JP of Monte to Minister of Government, March 13, 1827, JP of Magdalena to Minister of Government, March 11, 1827, both in AGN X-14-7-5 Tribunal de Justicia, Jueces de Paz 1827; JP of Capilla del Carmen to Chief of Police, May 4, 1825, in AGN X-35-11-13 Policía, Partes de campaña 1825). The same Alcalde de Hermandad who was determined to stamp out card games complained that someone always exercised influence to have the prisoners he remitted set free (Alcalde de Hermandad of San Vicente to Substitute Governor, August 29, 1820, in AGN X-11-8-9 Comandantes y Alcaldes de Campaña, etc. 1820). During periods of particularly intense military conflict, when the state moved toward strict enforcement of vagrancy laws to supply soldiers to the army, large ranchers protested bitterly about the impressment of their workers (see, e.g. AGN X-13-9-4 Justicia 1826; AGN X-14-7-5 Tribunal de Justicia, Jueces de Paz 1827; Rodriguez Molas 1982, pp. 131-132, 150-151).

In practice the various forms of coercive law introduced or reinforced after independence were used to break down horizontal networks among the rural lower classes and to reinforce vertical ties of patronage and dependency. Repressive laws were

selectively enforced, which promoted dependence on rural elites for protection from the state. The definition of who was a vagrant was left to the discretion of rural authorities, who were drawn from rural elites and often arrested individuals at the request of other local notables. Bernardo Ferreira, for example, was arrested in 1827 for being "a vagrant, and disobedient to the masters he came here to serve, who have complained to this judge." (JP of Guardia de Lujan to Chief of Police, Aug. 7, 1827, in AGN X-32-11-2 Policía (Libro 27), Partes de campaña 1827, No. 70). Individuals who were supported by members of the local elite willing to attest to their good character were generally not arrested for vagrancy. The vagrancy laws and other coercive controls over the rural population were just one part of a criminal justice system affected at all levels by influence-peddling and clientelism (Szuchman 1984, pp. 102-5). Like selectively applied capital punishment in eighteenth century England (Hay 1975), selectively enforced vagrancy laws fostered dependence on the benevolence of rural elites, thereby strengthening the rather weak patron-client bonds between large ranchers and the rural population.

Notes from rural authorities accompanying individuals remitted for vagrancy indicate how these individuals became defined as vagrants. Most of them were not arrested for vagrancy alone. Rural authorities generally stated that those remitted were vagrants and guilty or suspected of committing some other crime such as cattle theft, desertion from the military, carrying a knife in public, gambling, public intoxication, fighting, or insulting authorities. Many of those arrested for vagrancy were not accused of a specific criminal incident, but were labelled "a known thief" or simply "undesirable" (*perjudicial*). During times of rural unrest, many of the vagrants were also "suspicious" or "insolent" or had "disturbed public order". In practice vagrancy laws allowed rural authorities greater latitude and flexibility in the enforcement of order and discipline in the countryside. Those who were suspected of crimes, but against whom there was no evidence, and those who were guilty of uncodified offenses could still be arrested for vagrancy. The unemployed were not automatically classified as vagrants, but they were

arrested if they refused to seek work when ordered to do so. In 1825, Lino Sanchez and Mateo Correa were placed at the disposition of the Chief of Police because "they have been warned to either enlist in the police patrol or look for a master, and be contracted, and they have ignored the warning on various occasions" (Police Commissioner of San Vicente to Chief of Police, Aug. 31, 1825, in AGN X-35-11-13 Policia, Partes de campaña 1825). A frequent justification for considering someone a vagrant was "nobody knows him in these parts." José Caravallo, for example, was remitted in 1827 "for being found with a knife, without a work contract, and being unknown" (Police Commissioner of San Isidro to Chief of Police, Feb. 24, 1827, in AGN X-32-11-1 Policia (Libro 26), Partes de campaña 1827, No. 99). Not having a local patron was thus treated as if it were a crime in itself.

The Limits of Rural Coercion

Were the dominant classes of the province able to successfully subjugate the rural population? Only partially. Rural authorities repeatedly complained of their inability to adequately patrol the vast plains, of rural inhabitants who sheltered fugitives and rescued prisoners, of desertions by their own men (e.g. AGN X-13-8-6 Justicia 1825; *Registro Oficial* (Buenos Aires) 1822, pp. 209-11). Escape from custody was common. A report filed by the Lieutenant Alcalde of Puerto de Zarate at the end of 1825 indicates that, of the 22 individuals he had arrested and sent in to be processed by superiors that year, at least 5 had managed to escape before reaching their destination (Dec. 28, 1825, in AGN X-35-11-13 Policia, Partes de campaña 1825). Enforcing the law was particularly difficult on the sparsely populated plains south of the Salado River (JP of Monsalvo to Chief of Police, Feb. 15, 1826, in AGN X-13-9-4 Justicia 1826).

Mercy and selective application of laws were useful for building patron-client ties between large ranchers and the rural lower classes, but it should not be assumed that all

omissions in the application of the law resulted from the paternalism of the dominant classes. The implementation of vagrancy laws was also limited by what James Scott (1985) calls "everyday forms of resistance". The balance between resistance and official violence was continually shifting, and small scale acts of resistance posing a serious threat to the lives and property of individual members of the rural elite were common enough to motivate authorities to reach some accommodation with the local population. Unlike the wealthiest ranchers and merchants, who lived in the capital city, the Justices of the Peace and Alcaldes lived in the countryside and had to face the rural population in person. Rural authorities may have feared becoming favored targets for the small-scale cattle theft that was an everyday fact of life on the plains. Fear for personal safety also influenced their behavior. On the pampas of early nineteenth century Buenos Aires, where the lower classes were highly mobile and skilled in the use of knives, lances, and bolas, and the forces of order were spread thin, fear for personal safety may have been the most compelling reason of all to carry out the duties of Justice of the Peace or Alcalde with some discretion. Correspondence received by the provincial Chief of Police includes several reports of Alcaldes and members of police patrols being attacked by individuals they were attempting to arrest (e.g. communications from JP of Flores, July 2, 1825, and JP of Magdalena, July 25, 1825, both in AGN X-35-11-13 Policía, Partes de campaña 1825; from Police Commissioner of Monsalvo, June 29, 1828, in AGN X-32-11-4 Policía (Libro 31), Partes de campaña 1828). Such restrictions on the activity of JPs were probably the underlying reason for frequent complaints from police commissioners to their superiors about the laxity of Justices of the Peace and complaints by new Justices of the Peace about the state of affairs left by their predecessors (e.g. AGN X-13-8-6 Justicia 1825).

After almost a decade of the new rural police system, the capacity of the rural lower classes for collective action seemed just as strong as ever. Rural rebellion and banditry peaked during the civil war of 1828-29, which also provided an opportunity for settling scores with unpopular rural elites (Diaz 1959, pp. 123-4; González Bernardo

1987). The JP of Navarro reported in 1829 that "the bandits entered my ranch, and not only did they amuse themselves by not leaving me a single horse, they even chased me for eight leagues trying to kill me" (JP of Navarro to Minister of Government, March 17, 1829, in AGN X-15-3-1 Justicia, Jueces de Paz 1829). The difficulty of imposing order on the rural population, particularly their autonomous participation in the civil war of 1828-29, suggests that the dominant class of the province was willing to support the dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas after 1830 partly because, due to his popularity among the rural lower classes, he was the only person capable of controlling an unruly countryside. Although the position of large ranchers improved under Rosas, not even the Rosas regime could always maintain rural discipline. In 1832, for example, the JP of Chascomús reported to Rosas that his district was "infested" with "vagrants and ne'er-do-wells (*vagos y mal entretenidos*)" and that some cattle thieves were operating with impunity there (Feb. 10, 1832, in AGN X-20-10-7 Juzgado de Paz, Chascomús 1828-1852).

Conclusions

Although the changing nature of Buenos Aires's relationship to the world system in the early nineteenth century provided the upper classes of the province with a strong incentive to increase rural coercion, the nature of this coercion cannot be derived from the position of Buenos Aires in the world system. To understand the coercive laws of this period and the forms and limits of their application it has been necessary to examine at a more micro level the ecological and social environment in which the production of export staples took place, the ways in which these commodities were produced, and the experiences and struggles of those involved in producing them. The position of Buenos Aires in the world-system was crucial, but it is only the beginning of the story.

This paper has shown that both the juridical forms and the actual application of coercion in Buenos Aires after independence were strongly influenced by the possibilities for autonomous existence of, and the forms of resistance available to, the rural population, which were in turn shaped by the availability of open land and the existing technology of cattle production. Because large ranchers could not monopolize access to land, they could not rely on economic necessity to force the rural population to work for them, and equal levels of productivity among small and large producers rendered the use of economic incentives ineffective. The capacity for violence of the rural population and the availability of "exit" from undesirable social relationships prevented the direct imposition of labor obligations, and the seasonal nature of ranch work meant that ruthless repression of alternatives to wage labor was not feasible either. Large ranchers and rural authorities therefore attempted to manipulate repressive laws to increase the dependence of the rural lower classes on them for protection from state power and to strengthen patron-client ties. This strategy met with only partial success in the first half of the nineteenth century, however, as the rural lower classes retained considerable capacity for both individual and collective resistance, which tended to frustrate efforts to make them dependent on the benevolence of rural elites for protection.

This analysis indicates the need for a distinction between direct and indirect extra-economic coercion in addition to the commonly used distinction between economic and extra-economic coercion (Anderson 1974; Moore 1966; Wolf 1982). These forms of labor control are not mutually exclusive, and may occur in varying combinations. Although direct extra-economic coercion probably allows a higher degree of exploitation than indirect extra-economic coercion, the latter has some important ideological advantages for dominant classes. By displacing resistance to coercion from its principal beneficiaries to the state, indirect extra-economic coercion allows dominant classes to present themselves as protectors of the poor.

Dominant classes are particularly likely to rely on indirect extra-economic coercion to ensure an adequate supply of labor in situations where, as in early nineteenth century Buenos Aires, other options are excluded or severely restricted. Such a situation seems particularly likely to obtain when export staples requiring low levels of capital investment are produced in a context of frontier abundance. Indirect extra-economic coercion was not the only possible labor regime under which production of export staples would have been possible in post-colonial Buenos Aires. The most obvious alternative would have been expanded production of export staples by small settlers. In fact, it was partly to prevent this alternative that the dominant classes of the province used their political power to impose coercive controls on the rural population.

The tenuous situation of large ranchers in the early decades of the nineteenth century indicates that the expansion of ranching under the control of the dominant classes of the province was far from an automatic response to change in the relationship of Buenos Aires to the world system. The benefits gained through intensified rural coercion and domination of access to the world market in this period enabled the landed upper class to gradually reinforce its position. This landed oligarchy would shape subsequent Argentine history in crucial ways. Their power and the coercive methods with which they maintained their position can be seen as restricting possibilities for more egalitarian political and economic development for most of a century.

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