

## Chapter 2: *Caudillos* versus the Nation State

We confront a significant challenge when we attempt to tell the story of the fifty years after independence in Latin America. While a few societies (notably Brazil) experienced some stability, most Latin American countries seemed to disintegrate politically and economically after the end of Spanish rule. Introduced a certain way, these experiences might make Latin America seem backwards. Our task is to understand this chaos without reinforcing troubling stereotypes about the region.

Our approach here is to suggest that the breakdown of the political authority of the central state during this period was not terribly surprising, given both the historical weakness of the colonial state and the immense challenges facing the newly independent nations of the region. We also consider the fact that, while this breakdown was costly to some, it was quite beneficial to others. This chapter thus tells the story of long standing grievances and power struggles, which played out through the inability of any one group to establish dominance over others, rather than the dissolution of something widely understood as good (orderly politics).

This said, certain groups experienced the weakness of the central state in post-colonial Latin America as a serious problem, particularly those who identified with concepts such as *modernization* and *progress*. The failure of the post-colonial state caused even more alarm among Latin American elites than among outsiders. This is the reason we have chosen *The Slaughterhouse (El Matadero)* as the document for this chapter. More compactly written than other polemics of the day (such as Sarmiento's *Facundo*), this short story offers an opportunity to understand the modernizers' desire to implement their vision of the future on their societies. We should read the story for the simple pleasure of reading an interesting text, but it also provides a powerful example of the ways that art and rhetoric can privilege values as universal, even as they benefit some individuals at the expense of others.

### Questions to Consider when Reading the Documents

What is Echeverría's point in the text? What are the allegorical references?

What are the answers to his laments?

Do texts such as this successfully silence rural people, and those whose views differ from elites, as *barbarians*?

Were the rural folk who refused to bow down before progressive elites a model for a different society, or groups that were destined to be cast aside as their societies modernized?

Can we sustain a concept of modernization in which everybody does not benefit?