

Rise of the *Caudillos* in 1800s Latin America



Juan Manuel de Rosas was the prototypical caudillo, ruling Argentina from 1829 to 1832, and again from 1835 to 1852.

Caudillos usually started as local heroes with a base of support, and were often from wealthy landowning families. They could remain local, or attempt to expand their power base across their nation. *Caudillo* was an informal term, ultimately from the Latin *caput*, "head." It was not a constitutional office, although caudillos could also be Presidents or Generals in their nations. Often caudillos arose out of an era of violence and political discord. As one writer put it, "The caudillo was the father and the child of violence."

Often, caudillos cultivated personal loyalty, and like Rosas, turned political partisans into Rosistas and anti-Rosistas.

Rosas was a very wealthy landowner, owning 3600 square kilometers of land (one-third the size of Los Angeles county), in his will referring to hundreds of thousands of cattle, horses, and sheep.

In the 1820s, Argentina was split by a civil war pitting the Unitarian Party that wanted to send all exports through the port of Buenos Aires, and have a centralized government, against the Federalists, that wanted a more federal structure to Argentina's national government. In the conflicts, Federalist leaders were killed by their opponents. Supported a rural militia that he commanded, Rosas entered the capital and was welcomed into power by the Argentine House of Representatives.

Accomplishments of Rosas:

1. Rallied Argentina in the face of a failed French blockade of Argentina from 1838 to 1840, as well as the failed Anglo-French blockade from 1845-1850.
2. Helped create a national identity among Argentinians. They stayed united against the blockades, even with foreign ships patrolling their coasts and occasionally rivers.
3. Fought Brazil for control over what later became the independent nation of Uruguay.

Main criticism of Rosas: he maintained his power by the use of terror, killing thousands of political opponents. He was finally removed from power by a civil war led by Justo José de Urquiza, and supported by Brazil and Uruguay, countries that Rosas had antagonized in the past.