

A Critical Description of the *Caudillaje* of Juan Manuel de Rosas  
by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento from his book, *Facundo*

Leaving the House of Representatives, where he [Rosas] went to receive his staff of office, he withdraws in a coach painted red expressly for the ceremony. Yoked to the coach by cords of red silk are the men who, with criminal impunity, have kept the city in a state of continual alarm since 1833; they style themselves the People's Society, and they wear knives at the waist, red vests, and red ribbons with the slogan: "Death to the Unitarians." At the door of his house, these same men form an honor guard.

....All America has scoffed at these famous celebrations of Buenos Aires and looked at them as the maximum degradation of a people; but I see in them nothing but a political strategy, and an extremely effective one. How does one teach the idea of personalist government to a republic which has never had a king? The red ribbon is a token of the terror which goes with you everywhere, in the street, in the bosom of the family; you must think of it when dressing and undressing....

The story of the red ribbon is, indeed, curious, At first, it was an emblem adopted by enthusiasts; then they ordered everyone to wear it in order "to prove the unanimity" of public opinion, People meant to obey, but frequently forgot when they changed clothes. The police helped jog people's memories. The Mazorca patrolled the streets; they stood with whips at the church door when ladies were leaving Mass and applied the lash without pity. But there was still much which needed fixing. Did someone wear his ribbon carelessly tied?-The lash! A someone's ribbon too lash! A Unitarian!-Someone did not wear one at all?- Cut his throat! The reprobate!

The government's solicitude for public education did not stop there. It was not sufficient to be a Federalist, nor to wear the ribbon; it was obligatory also to wear a picture of the illustrious Restorer over one's heart. with the slogan "Death to the Savage, Filthy Unitarians." Enough, you think, to conclude the job of debasing a civilized people. robbing them of all personal dignity? Ah! They were not yet well enough disciplined. One morning, on a street Corner in Buenos Aires. there appeared a figure drawn on paper, With a ribbon half a yard long floating in the breeze. As soon as someone saw it, that person backed away in fright and spread the alarm. People ducked into the nearest store and came out with ribbons half a yard long floating in the breeze. Ten minutes later, the entire population was out in the street wearing ribbons half a yard long. Another day the figure reappeared with a slight alteration in the ribbon. The maneuver repeated itself. If some young lady forgot to wear a red bow in her hair, the police supplied one free-and attached it with melted tar! That is how they have created uniformity of public opinion! Search the Argentine Republic for someone who does not firmly believe and maintain that he is a Federalist!

Terror, you see, is a disease of the spirit which can become an epidemic like cholera, measles, or scarlet fever. No one is safe, in the end, from the contagion. Though you may work ten years at inoculating, not even those already vaccinated can resist in the end. Do not laugh, nations of Spanish America, when you witness such degradation! Look well, for you, too, are Spanish, and so the Inquisition taught Spain to be! This sickness we carry in our blood.