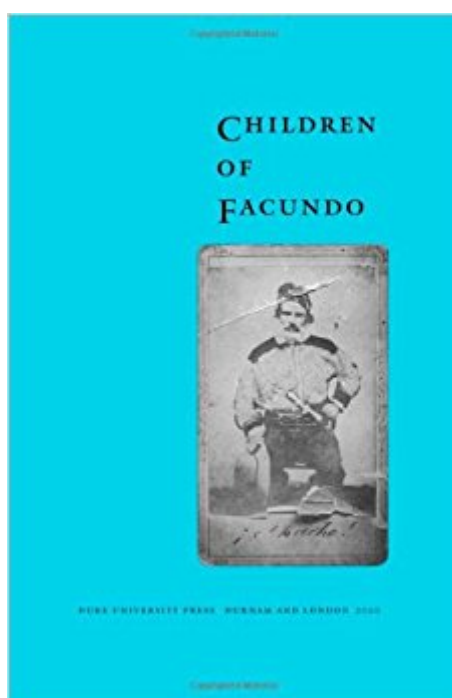


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Children Of Facundo: Caudillo And Gaucho Insurgency During The Argentine State-Formation Process (La Rioja, 1853-1870)



Synopsis

In *Children of Facundo* Ariel de la Fuente examines postindependence Argentinian instability and political struggle from the perspective of the rural lower classes. As the first comprehensive regional study to explore nineteenth-century society, culture, and politics in the Argentine interior—where more than 50 percent of the population lived at the time—the book departs from the predominant Buenos Aires-centered historiography to analyze this crucial period in the processes of state- and nation-building. La Rioja, a province in the northwest section of the country, was the land of the caudillos immortalized by Domingo F. Sarmiento, particularly in his foundational and controversial book *Facundo*. De la Fuente focuses on the repeated rebellions in this district during the 1860s, when Federalist caudillos and their followers, the gauchos, rose up against the new Unitarian government. In this social and cultural analysis, de la Fuente argues that the conflict was not a factional struggle between two ideologically identical sectors of the elite, as commonly depicted. Instead, he believes, the struggle should be seen from the perspective of the lower-class gauchos, for whom Unitarianism and Federalism were highly differentiated party identities that represented different experiences during the nineteenth century. To reconstruct this rural political culture de la Fuente relies on sources that heretofore have been little used in the study of nineteenth-century Latin American politics, most notably a rich folklore collection of popular political songs, folktales, testimonies, and superstitions passed down by old gauchos who had been witnesses or protagonists of the rebellions. Criminal trial records, private diaries, and land censuses add to the originality of de la Fuente's study, while also providing a new perspective on Sarmiento's works, including the classic *Facundo*. This book will interest those specializing in Latin American history, literature, politics, and rural issues.

Book Information

Paperback: 264 pages

Publisher: Duke University Press Books (November 15, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0822325969

ISBN-13: 978-0822325963

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 0.8 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #503,316 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #53 in Books > History >

Americas > South America > Argentina #500 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Caribbean & Latin American](#) #526 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Latin America](#)

Customer Reviews

“Children of Facundo will stand at the forefront of works on what is arguably the single most important topic among contemporary Latin American historians: the lower classes and nation-state formation. This is history from below at its best.”—Charles Walker, author of *Smoldering Ashes: Cuzco and the Creation of Republican Peru, 1780–1840* “De la Fuente has gone beyond integrating the subjects and issues of previous works on the subject in this methodologically sophisticated historiographic project: he has enriched them with important new insights. This contribution will be welcomed by specialists in the field.”—Tulio Halper n Donghi, author of *The Contemporary History of Latin America* “What a splendid book! Children of Facundo is sure to become one of the touchstones in the study of politics and society in nineteenth-century Latin America.”—Jeremy Adelman, Princeton University

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This is a study of the disharmony between the Federalists and Unitarians in the province of La Rioja and to a lesser extent the whole of Argentina during the political formative years of 1853 to 1870. The heart of the work is contained in the 1860's when the Federalist Caudillos of La Rioja led rebellions against the government of the Unitarians of Buenos Aires. The nature of the disunity and the outcome are examined from the perspective that the significant regional and societal uniqueness of the Riojana aristocracy and the relationship with the gauchos was the major ingredient for change. The two party interests and alignments created platforms, Unitarismo and Federalismo, that were diametrically opposed. De la Fuente tells this story from the perspective of the commonfolk - the gauchos. Ariel de la Fuente begins his study with an analysis of the Caudillos and the causes that led to the formation of the National State of Argentina and moves quickly in placing the Unitarians and Federalists under the microscope. In this second chapter the author

further his argument that the significance of the interior residents away from the urban center of Buenos Aires, fully one-half of Argentina's populace at that time, with its repeated rebellions against the Unitarian government impacted the political formation more than any other movement. The fourth chapter, "Gauchos, Montoneros and Montoneras" is a provocative dissection of these people and their modes of rebellion, which is followed up by the fifth chapter's explanation of how the Caudillos (Federalists) were able to cement their own movement. It is not until the sixth chapter that the author's creative usage of political jingles and folklore really becomes apparent. This original use of popular political ditties and folkloric tales is essential to the overarching thesis that it was outside of Buenos Aires that the most significant political growth and change occurred. Ariel de la Fuente does not rely solely upon these postmodernist tradition parcels for his evidence. There is an abundance of the traditionalist primary source materials, such as land records, court documents, and diaries, which will no doubt appease those who find it difficult to accept as hard evidence the oral traditions and folktales in explaining the successful political outcome for the Federalists. The author recognizes that success of the Federalist's movement was due in no small part with the gauchos' ability to become more than an ostensible member of the political process. De la Fuente has assembled a masterful piece of historiographical text that will excite historians of this field, furthermore, this re-worked dissertation is also of enough literary quality that bookstore browsers and history aficionados will not be intimidated. The openness of the text is a reflection of the liberal nature of the source material and the creative strength of the author's interpretive ability. This is without exception a scholarly publication, which might overwhelm the lay person at different intervals. The final two chapters demand that the reader have at the very least a working knowledge of the historical background Argentina, both in political terms and social constructs. Without some grounding in this area it is easy to fall victim to the author's opinions alone. For any students of Latin American/South American history *Children of Facundo* provides an intimate regional history that is well thought and cogently argued. More attention and explanation might have been made in regard to the songs, stories and oral culture earlier on in the book. After reading chapter six, I connected much better with the first half of the study. This may simply be a matter of personal taste, but I prefer a breakdown of the ethnic structure early on in this type of study, this allows me to create better mental images of the society throughout the read. By the end of the book I had no difficulty in accepting De la Fuente's process of argument and his overall conclusion, this work is a success.

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