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978-0-521-89567-5 - The Caudillo of the Andes: Andres de Santa Cruz

Natalia Sobrevilla Perea

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

Andrés de Santa Cruz y Calahumana was born in the city of La Paz in the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata in 1792 at the very end of the colonial period, when the Andes were still firmly under the control of the Spanish monarchy. He grew up in the aftermath of the greatest indigenous rebellion seen in 300 years and lived through the convulsed times that led to independence. Santa Cruz was an important participant during this time of change. He had the opportunity to lead and fought to shape the newly established republics in the Andes.

This is the story of a man, but it is also the story of a time and a place. Indeed, this life story is an entry point into the world in which this particular man lived. It is much more the story of the place he inhabited than a tale of the man as an individual. It does not attempt to reconstruct his personal life in detail; rather, it focuses on the politics of his time and the part he played in the process by which the countries we now know as Peru and Bolivia came into being.

Santa Cruz is often overlooked in history books when the wars of independence and the early national periods are studied because little attention is paid to the complicated events that took place in this region. His life, however, provides an excellent illustration to help us understand the process by which new nations were created once the Spanish Empire began to unravel. It provides an opportunity to look at the long-term consequences of these processes. The region where Santa Cruz spent most of his life, and where he left his largest mark, is seldom regarded as a unit. This is to a large degree because Peru and Bolivia are now two very different republics, and studies have tended to favor the national unit. Santa Cruz felt closely bound to both countries that emerged from independence, and he had to come to terms with them

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becoming different nation-states. He had to deal with being considered as a foreigner in Peru, a land he believed to be his own. During his lifetime, he saw many different administrative divisions in these regions, and this made it possible for him to imagine a union between these two countries. Between 1836 and 1839, he was, albeit briefly, able to put this idea into practice and create a Peru-Bolivia Confederation.

Santa Cruz was a man bound to the military; he trained from a young age with the Spanish militias, and first encountered war at the age of seventeen. He learned everything he knew about campaigning in the Andes under the command of men from southern Peru, who were fiercely loyal to the King of Spain. These men were convinced the area around Lake Titicaca should remain a political union, even after it was divided between two viceroyalties with the creation of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata in 1776. When the main cities in this viceroyalty (Chuquisaca, La Paz, and later Buenos Aires) created Juntas to govern in the name of the King of Spain in 1809 and 1810, the people of southern Peru organized armies to prevent the provinces close to the lake from separating from the viceroyalty of Peru. To a large degree this is what Santa Cruz attempted throughout his career: to keep these provinces united. He was convinced that the linkages between them were so strong that they should remain together. What he learned in his youth from the men of Arequipa and Cuzco, who led the first armies organized in the southern Andes to fight against the Juntas, inspired his thinking. In addition, Santa Cruz learned the best ways of conducting war in this area.

Even after changing sides and joining those fighting for independence in 1820, his desire to keep these provinces united remained unchanged. The military was the backbone of his project. During the years of fighting for independence, he was instrumental in creating a national army, and he was one of the people in charge of transferring knowledge and experience from the colonial army to the first embryonic national army of Peru. Santa Cruz had the opportunity to further widen his understanding of tactics and strategy after coming in contact with men who had experience in guerrilla warfare, as well as with those who fought alongside with freed slaves. After meeting Antonio José de Sucre and Simón Bolívar, Santa Cruz became more accustomed to using the rhetoric of freedom, to the need to foster feelings of belonging among his followers, and to the idea of establishing constitutions to create nations and federations. We know very little of his thoughts from before then, because previously he had no need to use this language to seek support.

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We do not know to what degree these were ideas he really believed in, or how much his thinking had moved on from former ideas. He was not in a position of command, and the main argument put forward by those loyal to the crown was the importance of remaining faithful to the king, who was the legitimate authority.

Once Santa Cruz did start using the discourse of freedom, he combined it with all the knowledge he had acquired throughout his career, mastering these rhetorical devices and combining them with an excellent grasp of practical matters. Wars in the early nineteenth century were, among other things, about keeping control of troops – making sure men were clothed, fed, paid, and kept happy enough that they would not desert en masse.

The army and the militia were at the center of Santa Cruz's idea of governance. His letters clearly show his view that a successful government must dominate the armed forces. This included having loyal and committed militias in urban areas, as well as rural auxiliary forces that could be called on to provide further support. His strategy, however, went beyond controlling the military; it also involved competent management of the economy and the development of modern legislation. Clear legislation and incentives for trade and economic growth encouraged the most affluent members of society to contribute to his project. Santa Cruz was a state builder, whose ambition was to ensure a strong and well-administered country. He wanted to create a viable state that would become embodied in an innovative union: the Confederation of Peru and Bolivia.

THE CAUDILLO OF THE ANDES

Santa Cruz epitomized a Spanish-American *caudillo*. This book is an attempt to come to terms with what exactly a *caudillo* was within the context of the nineteenth-century Andean world. The word originates in Spanish from *cabeza* – head – and traditionally referred simply to a leader. In colonial times it was sometimes used to describe a member of the military and on some occasions, even viceroys. *Caudillo* could be employed positively or negatively. It was the word used to portray Túpac Amaru and the leaders of the Indian uprising that ravaged the southern Andes in the 1780s. A positive use of the term became popular when the port of Buenos Aires was invaded by the British in 1806 and 1807; the leaders of the local militias who fought against the invaders were also called *caudillos*.

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Napoleon was called by this term as well. Initially this had a positive slant, because the French were Spanish allies. But after Napoleon invaded the Spanish peninsula, *caudillo* was used increasingly with pejorative connotations. When fighting erupted in the Americas, the revolutionary leaders were referred to as *caudillos* or *insurgentes* by those who remained loyal to the king. After independence, the term continued to be used as shorthand for “leader.” But with time it became a term of derision. This was due in large part to its association with the Argentine context in which *caudillos* were described by most prominent literary figures of the nineteenth century as barbarous.

Domingo Faustino Sarmiento was the first person to use the term to characterize what he considered to be a typically Argentine phenomenon. He linked it to the geographical space of the pampas that, inhabited by *gauchos*, could only be governed by *caudillos*.¹ His book *Facundo* describes the life and times of a provincial leader who ruled through terror. In reality, the book was a commentary on the Argentine leader Juan Manuel de Rosas, who controlled the province of Buenos Aires through violent means and who eschewed the notion of becoming president of the whole of Argentina or creating a constitution.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Sarmiento began the discussion of *caudillismo* as an explanation for the social development of Spanish America. The debate continues to resonate to this day. Some contend that in the Latin American context, because of the legacy of *caudillismo*, only strong leaders can prevail. At the heart of this discussion is the dichotomy Sarmiento established between civilization and barbarism. He contended that civilization could be found in the city and legal government. Barbarism, on the other hand, was embodied by the rural areas and the *caudillo*. The discussion of *caudillismo* became central to the debate over the difficulties of unifying Argentina as a nation. Subsequently, *caudillos* have been portrayed as heroes and villains by opposing sides of an intensely political debate that still rages in Argentina and beyond.

It is important, however, to ask what is understood by *caudillismo* in the region more generally. It is also necessary to question how useful this term is in places like the Andes that are so different from the Argentine pampas. Although the discussion of *caudillismo* has not been as pervasive throughout the continent as it has been in Argentina, it was used to understand Bolivia by one of its most prominent

¹ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo o Civilización y Barbarie*, Buenos Aires: Ed. Huelmul, [1845] 1978.

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twentieth-century writers. Alcides Arguedas published *Los caudillos letrados* in 1922 and *Los caudillos barbaros* in 1929.² He included Santa Cruz among the former and argued that *caudillos* were part of the fabric of government in Bolivia. Arguedas noted how the *caudillos* had gone from being literate to being barbarous. This, in itself, was a commentary on Sarmiento.³

In the English language, *caudillismo* has been often used as shorthand for Latin American leaders who are sometimes described as “men on horseback.” Such leaders, according to early twentieth-century writers such as Charles Chapman, governed with the support of wealthy land-owning Creoles as long as they could offer peace and security in exchange. Although Chapman believed that revolutions could be fought in the name of principles, some considered that the only substantive change was of person and ritual, while laws and constitutions remained virtually unaltered.⁴ This vision of *caudillismo* prevailed until the 1960s, when it began to be understood as a Latin American variant of patronage. The idea was that relationships were structured around the exchange of benefits and protection. The patron, a word associated in its origin with Rome, provided for the client, who in return would remain bound to the patron.

Caudillos have been interpreted by most scholars writing in English as charismatic leaders who were able to attain power because they had a large following of clients. Charisma, understood following Max Weber as the ability of one person to rule others by sheer strength of personality, remains one of the most popular explanations of *caudillismo*, even though many of the leaders were not really that charismatic. Another widely accepted explanation correlates local Spanish-American culture and the legacy of the colonial period with the development of *caudillos*. Nineteenth-century accounts focused strongly on personality, whereas Richard Morse was one of the preeminent advocates of a culturalist explanation for *caudillismo*.⁵

² Alcides Arguedas, “Los Caudillos Letrados” in *Historia General de Bolivia (El proceso de la nacionalidad) 1809–1921*, La Paz, Arnó editores, 1922; *Caudillos bárbaros, historia – resurrección. – La tragedia de un pueblo (Melgarejo–Morales) 1864–1872*, Barcelona: Viuda de L. Tasso, 1929.

³ The negative connotation of the term *caudillo* is indeed so strong that Carlos Mesa Gisbert, Bolivian ex-president and devoted *crucista*, asked me to reconsider whether Santa Cruz was really a *caudillo*. Personal communication, March 2010.

⁴ Charles Chapman, “The Age of Caudillos: A Chapter in Hispanic American History,” *Hispanic American Historical Review (HAHR)*, vol. 12, 1932, pp. 292–3.

⁵ Richard Morse “Towards a Theory of Spanish American Government,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 15, 1954, pp. 71–93.

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Others, such as Tulio Halperín Donghi, have traced *caudillismo* to what they describe as structural issues that resulted from the wars of independence.⁶ Among the structuralists, there are three main interpretations, and most authors accept a combination of them.⁷ The “political vacuum” interpretation, described by Charles Walker, is one of the most widely accepted structuralist explanations. It rests on the assumption that there were no able governing classes in the aftermath of independence, whereas there was an abundance of military men, so these *caudillos* came to control the governments. Walker criticizes this view for not considering the real mechanics of politics by reducing the whole issue to the relationship between patrons and clients.⁸ Another structural explanation is based on the economic fragility that plagued most of the newly founded republics. However, as Paul Gootenberg has shown in his study of the financing of *caudillos* in Peru and Donald Stevens in his for the case of Mexico, it is hard to distinguish whether economic difficulties led to *caudillismo* or vice versa.⁹ Regional conflict has also been seen as a structural cause for the development of *caudillos*, as leaders from regions fought against the center. John Lynch, who has written extensively about the cases of Argentina and Venezuela, asserts that the *caudillo* “first emerged as a local hero, a strong man of his region, whose authority derived from ownership of land, access to men and resources and achievements.”¹⁰

Lynch has done much to unravel the meaning of *caudillismo* and describe these leaders in greater detail. His work moved away from traditional interpretations of *caudillos* and concentrated on a structural

⁶ Tulio Halperín Donghi, *Hispanoamérica Después de la Independencia*, Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1972.

⁷ In “Peasants, Caudillos, and the State in Peru: Cuzco in the Transition from Colony to Republic, 1780–1840,” PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1992, p. 18, Charles Walker presents a useful review of the literature drawing mainly from the work of Frank Safford, “Politics, Ideology and Society in Post-Independence Spanish America,” *Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. III, pp. 347–421.

⁸ Walker, “Peasants, Caudillos, and the State,” p. 23.

⁹ Paul Gootenberg, “Paying for Caudillos: The Politics of Emergency Finance in Peru, 1820–1845,” in Peloso and Tenenbaum, *Liberals, Politics and Power*, state formation in nineteenth-century Latin America, Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp. 134–165; Donald F. Stevens, *Origins of Instability in Early Republican Mexico*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991.

¹⁰ John Lynch, *Caudillos in Spanish America 1800–1850*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1992, p. 4.

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analysis. Lynch sought to create a model for the whole region based on meticulous studies. His conclusions, however, are problematic when they are generalized. After concentrating on the prairie regions, Lynch concluded that *caudillos* emerged when there was an institutional vacuum, where formal rules were absent and political confrontation was resolved through conflict. These were agrarian societies where the relationship between landowner and peasants was that between a patron and a client. According to Lynch, a *caudillo* had to be both “autonomous in that he owed obedience to no one beyond him” and “absolute in that he shared his power with no other person or institution.”¹¹ All this gave significant specificity to the existing description of *caudillos*, in the English-speaking context, but did little to dispel the assumption that it was little more than a very specific form of patron-client relationships, centered in this case in the large landholdings typical of this geographical area.

Andrés de Santa Cruz’s life blows apart many of the long-held assumptions on *caudillismo*. As long as the term remains short-hand for patron-client relationships of a certain type, and not much effort is made to understand the nuances between different leaders, the term will not be very useful. In the case of Andrés de Santa Cruz, some of the elements described by Lynch are present. But none of them completely capture the complex reasons for his rise to power and his ability to govern. To conclude that he did so because he could provide his clients with patronage would certainly not be an accurate reflection of the richness of his character or the time in which he lived. He was no doubt a man of a certain charisma, although not in comparison to Bolívar’s famed persona. Moreover, most of his contemporaries thought he was a successful administrator, rather than a leader of multitudes. Bolívar’s Irish aide-de-camp, Daniel O’Leary, described him as having a “Jesuit’s character” and considered him to be obsessed with money and the ambition to lead.¹² These were indeed useful traits, given that the backbone of Santa Cruz’s power was the army. He was not a great landowner who had workers and peons to provide him with a basis for government. Although the Bolivian government did assign him some land, Santa Cruz never dedicated much effort to the role of landowner. He remained throughout his

¹¹ Lynch, *Caudillos in Spanish America 1800–1850*, p. 9.

¹² Letter from Daniel F. O’Leary to Simón Bolívar, 1828. In *Detached Recollections*, edited by R. Humphreys London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1969. I thank Matthew Brown for pointing me to this reference.

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life, even when in exile, a committed member of the military and always took pride in using his uniform and his rank of army general. Santa Cruz was not an exception, and many other leaders of this period in the Andes had very similar experiences. Some, such as Agustín Gamarra or Felipe Santiago Salaverry, were not as successful as Santa Cruz in applying the model, whereas another, Ramón Castilla, perfected it in a later period of economic bonanza in Peru. This makes it necessary to reevaluate the term *caudillo* in the Andean context.

Some of the most interesting recent research on *caudillismo* has focused on trying to understand why people followed these leaders. The work of Gootenberg opened this path of inquiry, as he stressed the importance of trade policies in the *caudillo* struggles.¹³ Walker deepened this analysis for the case of the Andes, showing how *caudillos* created multi-class alliances and emphasized the importance of understanding their ideology.¹⁴ Ariel de la Fuente took the debate in the River Plate to a further level by studying the close relationships between leaders and their followers, and how this led to the identification of the “clients” with the *caudillos*, concluding that these were not class-based movements, and *caudillos* were not completely autonomous political actors.¹⁵ The work of Cristobal Aljovín has argued that Indians in Peru participated in the army from the end of the colonial period and how after independence *caudillos* eagerly sought their backing.¹⁶ Cecilia Méndez has further demonstrated the way in which peasants were involved in the process of “state making” and did not remain “impervious to this process.”¹⁷ She asserts that peasants related better to liberals and chose to support them because the state proposed by their *caudillos* allowed them “a greater degree of political autonomy and legitimacy.”¹⁸ This

¹³ Paul Gootenberg, *Between Silver and Guano. Commercial Policy and the State in Postindependence Peru*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991.

¹⁴ Charles Walker, *Smoldering Ashes, Cuzco and the Creation of Republican Peru, 1780, 1840*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999, p. 224.

¹⁵ Ariel De La Fuente, *Children of Facundo: Caudillo and Gaucho Insurgency Suring the Argentine State Formation Process (La Rioja, 1853–1870)*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000, pp. 3, 4, 192.

¹⁶ Cristóbal Aljovín de Losada, *Caudillos y constituciones. Perú: 1821–1845*, Lima: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000, pp. 191–212.

¹⁷ Cecilia Méndez, *The Plebeian Republic: The Huanta Rebellion and the Making of the Peruvian State 1820–1850*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005, p. 13. Also see “Tradiciones liberales en los Andes: militares y campesinos en la formación del estado peruano,” *EIAL* vol. 15, no. 1, 2004, pp. 35–63.

¹⁸ Méndez, *The Plebeian Republic*, p. 218.

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new scholarship makes it possible to look at *caudillos* in a different, more nuanced light. They were of course still patrons who provided their “clients” with goods and services, but they were also able political operators who managed to put together alliances among multiple classes and who were closely bound to their men in such a way that their followers developed a close identification with them.

Caudillos and the armed forces were at the center of Andean politics. This was how Santa Cruz and his contemporaries understood the practice of politics. These were not, however, military dictators as we picture them after the experiences of twentieth-century Latin America.¹⁹ Santa Cruz, although he wore a military uniform, was not the same kind of leader as Augusto Pinochet. Neither was it the case that the military, as an institution, controlled government in the same way that it did during the 1970s in Argentina or Peru. In the nineteenth century, in the years after independence, the leaders of these new countries all established their legitimacy to govern based on the idea that they had fought for the nation. They were the *padres de la patria*, the “fathers of the nation,” citizens who took up arms. This gave them the right to participate and lead in the political sphere. In reality the army provided these leaders with potential clients. Lynch also included Antonio López de Santa Anna among his case studies, and in his detailed biography Will Fowler concurs that this Mexican leader could be described as a *caudillo* and sees his power as originating from his position as a landowner who could count with the backing of his peons and the popular sectors in his region of Veracruz.²⁰ Although there are differences with the leaders of the plains, some similarities with the *caudillos* of the Andes do emerge. The most striking similarity is the origin of these leaders in the wars of independence, and their background in colonial militias that gave them a strong understanding of the importance of maintaining at least the semblance of an institution.

At the most basic level, the army provided soldiers with benefits such as uniforms, salaries, and retirement pensions. During this time, the records show a close relationship between the state, particular *caudillos*, and the members of the army. This relationship also had a negative

¹⁹ This is an association that authors such as Hugh Hamill have repeatedly made; see *Caudillos: Dictators in Spanish America*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992.

²⁰ Will Fowler, *Santa Anna of Mexico*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007, pp. 88–9.

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effect that often led to recurrent political instability. Because the future of mid-ranking officers and even soldiers could be linked to particular leaders, they had considerable incentive to ensure that their *caudillo* would remain in power. This was an important reason why leaders were able to maintain the loyalty of their backers at the times of uprisings. If their *caudillo* was defeated by an opponent, the men who backed him could face reprisals, such as losing their pay, losing their appointments, or even being sent into exile. Unless they were co-opted by the new leader, the prospect of these reprisals gave them an incentive to support their *caudillo* in any attempt to retake office. The question of providing a political future for subalterns was also crucial. Antonio Zapata has argued that a great weakness in the Confederation designed by Santa Cruz was that it thwarted the promotion possibilities for Bolivian and Peruvian generals.²¹

Not only did *caudillos* need to maintain the support of their closest allies, but they also tried to enhance their power by appealing to support from a wide circle. In the case of Santa Cruz, this was done in public ceremonies that fêted his accomplishments. Special days, such as his birthday, were occasions for feasts that often lasted for days. The leader who had brought so much success to the country was celebrated in the public sphere. This built on and deepened the relationship between the *caudillo*, who provided material goods, and his men, who were there to back him. Santa Cruz took great care to maintain the core of his support. He paid a great deal of attention to providing soldiers with all they needed, and made every effort to ensure that the provinces that were the source of most of his backing received tangible economic gains. The difference between a successful campaign and a failed one, in a particular region, often had to do with the ability of a leader to ensure that the local economy and the local elites benefited from their connections with the *caudillo*. During the Confederation, this was the case in the provinces of Southern Peru, from which most of Santa Cruz's backing came. The people in these areas could see the difference between his intervention there and the looting and forcible conscription carried out by his enemies. The question of clothing soldiers and officers was fundamental, as it benefited not only those serving in the army, but also

²¹ Antonio Zapata Velasco, "La Política Peruana y la Confederación Perú Boliviana" in *Guerra, región y nación: La Confederación Perú Boliviana 1836–1839*, Carlos Donoso and Jaime Rosenblitt, eds., Santiago: Universidad Andrés Bello, 2009, pp. 93–116.