

## Breve historia contemporánea de la Argentina

Romero Luis Alberto

Thorough and seemingly balanced

I read the Breve Historia in preparation for my first visit to Argentina since 1980. What was that odd hush over Buenos Aires that one noticed in 1980? Why is it that Argentina experiences an economic crisis every three years or so, and sixty years experienced military coups every decade or so?

As the previous reviewer noted, Argentina's turbulence is probably due to the structure of the economy and the people. It has always made its money by exporting agricultural products. Their system of estancias originated with huge land grants to early Spanish settlers, and perpetuated itself because large-scale operations are most efficient in agriculture. The pampas are shifting now from cattle to crops and orchards, but the economies of scale remain. It is coming to resemble California's central valley, with criollos playing the part of Mexicans.

Top echelons of the military have historically been drawn from the country's leading families. The Catholic Church has been a constant, and generally conservative, influence. Arrayed against them have been labor unions, socialists, anarchists and urban guerilla groups. Romero could do a better job of drawing the foreign connections: most of these would seem to have fed on European intellectual currents of the early 20th century.

He is especially critical of the Videla/Viola military government of 1976-83. Whatever benefit may have derived from finally suppressing the Montoneros and other guerilla groups, a mixed clandestine/overt government can have no moral authority. Lacking the authority to discipline its own supporters, the government allowed the military to chronically overspend, to go beyond the pretext of removing dissidents and simply "disappear" people in order to loot their estates, and permitted all sorts of financial shannanigans that ultimately undermined any legitimacy their "reorganization" program might have wished to claim.

I enjoyed Romero's use of Spanish. I kept a dictionary on hand not to understand what he wrote, because context easily filled in most of the blanks, but for the joy of learning new words and seeing them so well deployed.