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## Review of *Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier* By Richard W. Slatta

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*Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier.* By Richard W. Slatta. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983. Tables, illustrations, appendices, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. 271 pp. \$21.95.

Professor Slatta has written a solid social history of the Argentine countryside in the nineteenth century. Not only does he describe and analyze the life-style of the gauchos—in itself, a formidable task—but he also outlines changes in the economy and in the political structure.

Slatta's research is quite thorough. He avoids

the tendency of many historians of Argentina to overlook primary sources, especially in the Archivo General de la Nación. Moreover, the author has looked into provincial archives, particularly those at Tandil, and demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the relevant secondary sources.

Handsomely produced and graced by attractive illustrations as well as convincing statistical data, *Gauchos and the Vanishing Frontier* is well organized. Slatta is a rigorous scholar, and his book is analytical rather than descriptive. Although the empirical foundations of the narrative are quite sound, it is not always a smooth read. Slatta knows how to turn a phrase, but he frequently repeats himself. Nevertheless, the book has a fine geographic context and will certainly be the definitive study of the gauchos as well as a major addition to Argentine history.

Slatta supports the growing notion that nineteenth-century elites progressed at the expense of the masses and of indigenous cultures such as the gauchos. Vagrancy laws, conscription, and internal passports, and the introduction of technological changes (such as shearing machines, wire fences, and railroads) robbed the gaucho of his mobility. The elites considered the gauchos racially inferior and addicted to habits that impeded modernization and integration into the world economy. Therefore, Slatta argues, the oligarchy encouraged a massive wave of five million foreign immigrants to enter Argentina and displace the gauchos in the countryside. The author also notes that changes in rural life in the United States were somewhat similar, but land policies were not. Curiously enough, Slatta concludes by demonstrating that the oligarchs began championing the gaucho as the symbol of Argentine nationalism—a reaction to the prosperity and working-class organization of the foreign immigrants.

I concur with nearly all of Slatta's conclusions and appreciate his willingness to challenge other works that have recently appeared, particularly Jonathan Brown's study of the Argentine economy. Slatta shows that Argentine society was quite dependent upon the world

economy once the elites strengthened their grip on the country.

My major criticism would be a disappointment that the author did not say more about the gauchos of Paraguay and Brazil, particularly the much-studied province of Rio Grande do Sul. This region comprises two countries that are as gaucho as Argentina.

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