



THE PARAGUAYAN WAR Causes and Early Conduct 2nd Edition by Thomas L. Whigham

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Preface to the 2018 Edition

When the first edition of this work appeared with the University of Nebraska Press in 2002, it was safe to assume that the 1864-1870 Paraguayan (or Triple Alliance) War was little known outside of Paraguay, and in that country it tended to be treated as the stuff of legend rather than as a key subject for scholarly research and debate. A few historians in Europe, South America, and the United States had touched on the war in the course of their studies, but they were mostly working in isolation from each other. More than a few had given up hope that the topic would ever get the attention that it deserved. They observed that a full and synthetic treatment of the Paraguayan War required research in archives and libraries in a half-dozen countries, and none had the energy, the time, or the resources to undertake such an investigation. I had already been thinking of making a stab at providing just such a synthesis, but I, too, was under no illusion that the full story would be easy to understand or analyze. Any effort to do this would require many years of work, probably upwards of a decade.

Little did I know at the time that many other scholars had either started their own exciting research on the war or were soon to be pulled into its vortex. As many have pointed out, such investigations can assume the proportions of an obsession, for the Paraguayan War tells so much about society, conflict, and identity in South America and yet

keeps begging more questions. Indeed, the torrent of new studies that have appeared since 2002 has, I think, confirmed my initial thesis that the Paraguayan War was a catalyst to change historical patterns and politics in the southern continent in an unmistakable way. This made it broadly appealing to scholars and readers. All that really remained was to get the books published and the debates rolling.

When Paraguayan president Francisco Solano López seized the Brazilian steamer Marqués de Olinda in November 1864, few could have foreseen the devastating conflict that he had unleashed. Little more than five years later, President López, along with most of his fellow Paraguayans, and tens of thousands of Brazilian, Argentine, and Uruguayan soldiers, was dead. Many others had been evacuated from the battlefields and now lay broken and maimed in military hospitals from Asunción to Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and beyond. Paraguay's civilian population had shrunk to less than half of its prewar total and the country's economy had largely ceased to function. In Brazil, the army gained a measure of political clout that it had never previously enjoyed and which it did not fail to use in future years, often against the emperor whose honor the soldiers had so vigorously defended in Paraguay. The Brazilian Empire's inability to win a quick victory sharply revealed the monarchical regime's many weaknesses. In Argentina, the national government used the conflict to settle its domestic political agenda by crushing its provincial rivals, setting up a pattern of economic development that favored the great landowners of Buenos Aires, and assuring that future struggles in the region would likely center on questions of class rather than provincial disputes. In sum, the Triple Alliance War was a crucible that permanently changed political parameters in South America.

All the scholars who have worked on the war since 2002 argued for its centrality and wished to see it accorded a more prominent place in the historiography of nations and society. Their concern was in part political. The war's sesquicentennial was due to begin in 2014 and various governments in South America were allocating funds to commemorate

the struggle. Grade-school textbooks in each country attested to the war's importance, but few scholarly works had been written in recent years, so government ministers in charge of cultural matters were actively searching for new faces and new work to sponsor. Many of the younger scholars eventually put in an appearance as talking heads in television documentaries. And a great many more took the opportunity to reacquaint themselves with the classic works and make the effort, finally, to talk with each other about what the war meant.

Not surprisingly, major academic conferences were now regularly being held to address this new scholarship; many people were excited about future possibilities. Several conferences held outside South America actually got the ball rolling. As early as 2001, a panel at the Society for Military History's Calgary conference was devoted to research on the Paraguayan War.² Then, in 2005, a three-day conference was held at the École des Hautes Études de Sciences Sociales in Paris under the name "Le Paraguay a l'Ombre de ses Guerres." Finally, in 2008, a series of major conferences was inaugurated at the University of Montevideo with the convocation of the Jornadas Internacionales de la Historia del Paraguay, which has met in the city biennially ever since. Although the jornadas cover a wider scope of Paraguayan history than just the 1864-1870 conflict, they clearly offer a venue for an international audience to discuss the war. A number of the scholars who had participated in the Calgary and Paris conferences attended the Montevideo jornadas and saw their contributions published in conference proceedings.3

The Jornadas Internacionales de la Historia del Paraguay were not the only academic conferences that were held during these years. A major conference touching on various aspects of the war was also held at Argentina's Museo Histórico Nacional in 2008. The armed forces of the Platine countries and Brazil, which have their own historical institutes, have also held meetings focusing on the scholarship of the war. A good example of this latter sort of organization is the Encuentro Internacional de Historia of the Uruguayan Army, which regularly ad-

dresses the "Operaciones Bélicas de la Guerra de la Triple Alianza." There have also been regional academic conferences, often hosted by state universities in both the Argentine Northeast and Brazil, that deal extensively or partially with the war. There are other examples, but the main point is that what was once a relatively limited scholarly endeavor has grown dramatically in scope and ambition.

The conversations that have unfolded at these conferences have been generally healthy, though in some quarters they inspired a reaction that confirmed, rather than challenged, the old dichotomies that had defined the analysis of the war. One might have thought that the traditional Lopista versus anti-Lopista interpretations would have already spent themselves by the 1970s.⁶ The adherents of both camps proved surprisingly resilient, however, and relatively immune to the new scholarship, much of which they refused to read. The Lopistas gained some ground through the internet, which, as everyone knows, has given a venue to some good work but has also highlighted some of the most ahistorical approaches.

Revisionists of both the Left and the Right also got a curious new lease on life in 2012, when the Paraguayan legislature abruptly passed an impeachment measure to depose Fernando Lugo, the country's populist left-wing president. Though this action was, strictly speaking, legal, it brought the immediate condemnation of the governments of Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina, which moved to enact provisions within the MERCOSUR agreement to diplomatically isolate Paraguay. The reaction to this censure in Paraguay was entirely predictable—even left-wing activists denounced the neighboring countries as a new Triple Alliance engaged in an undeclared war against Paraguay reminiscent of what the country faced in the 1860s. As one newspaper put it, the "malignant spirit of the Alliance has been reincarnated among those who govern the neighboring countries."

Although the formal actions of the three countries (along, it should be noted, with Chavez's Venezuela) were of short duration and had a limited effect in a Paraguay that was experiencing an economic boom, the reference to the Triple Alliance certainly stirred historical memories among people who saw themselves as perennial victims. Rightly or wrongly, it offered them a new chance to grapple with the legacies of the 1860s. And those readers of Paraguayan national newspapers who stretched their imaginations far enough even found in Venezuela's unmistakable machinations a useful—or insidious—analogue to the "Perfidious Albion" of the 1864–1870 struggle.

Outside critics who normally would never have found much to endorse in a Colorado-dominated Paraguay were made nervous by these references to the Triple Alliance War, and those commentators on the right who dissented from their countries' policies vis-à-vis Paraguay began in 2012 to find a reason to praise the ghost of Francisco Solano López. Politicians throughout South America who perceived little need to back up their arguments with rational historical proof nonetheless gave the green light to scholars to start afresh their more serious investigations. All of this gave far greater immediacy to the Triple Alliance struggle as a subject for research.

The reaction to Lugo's 2012 impeachment made evident something that should have been clear from much earlier: the war really had sunk deep roots not only among the Paraguayans, but also among Brazilians, Argentines, and Uruguayans who felt a common sense of guilt in their appraisal of regional imperialism. Anthropological research on collective memory in rural Paraguay has revealed the war's continued pull in the countryside.⁸ And in the cities, where television, radio, and print media play an active role in shaping public perceptions, rarely a day goes by without some explicit reference to the war and what it might mean for today's world.

So many books and scholarly articles on the Triple Alliance War have appeared since 2002 that I hesitate to mention more than a few of the more interesting works and themes. When I first started researching the conflict in the early 1990s, for example, I was told by more than one South American historian that photographs and images of the war were so rare as to not be worth searching for. Now, I can happily report that

more than a few volumes of images have been published that reproduce a substantial corpus of the war's photographic and lithographic record. Similarly, the publication of hitherto little-known or difficult-to-access primary sources has made possible new insights into the war's effects on society. These elements are only now being explored, but the prospect of unexpected discoveries is very solid indeed. The themes that Hendrik Kraay and I sought to address in our 2005 compilation, *I Die with My Country*—notably the war's social impact and its relation to race, gender, and nationalism—continues to attract attention from Latin Americanists. The "war and society" approach pioneered by military historians has also sown some exciting crops and, in the case of the Paraguayan War, the harvest promises to be plentiful. The concomitant effect on how military historians and social scientists conduct their work in South America has likewise been noteworthy.

Several broad overviews of the war have appeared in recent years. One was Chris Leuchars's *To the Bitter End*, which appeared early in 2002. Though it focused narrowly on the military dynamics of the war, and did so using only secondary materials, it offered some of the most suggestive insights in this area since the publication of General Augusto Tasso Fragoso's opus in 1957.¹² Four other studies appeared afterwards, all building upon previous military and diplomatic histories (most notably the Spanish edition of Francisco Doratioto's landmark study, *Maldita Guerra*, which was first published in Portuguese in 2002).¹³

The problem these authors faced is that they required extensive research in archives in many countries and a solid understanding, if not a mastery, of at least four different historiographical traditions (not counting the many variants of revisionism). Even in an age of internet communication and competent inter-library loan services, this represented no small challenge for the scholar. And yet there has been significant progress. Luc Capdevila's *Une guerre totale* provides a fascinating "archaeology" of the war, one based on extensive archival research and a thorough analysis of French consular records. Marco Fano's *Il Rombo del Cannone Liberale* does something similar (and with a similar en-

thusiasm) with the Italian documentation, covering the war battle by battle and providing an analytic model that finds inspiration in broader Platine themes. Published by Santillana-Taurus in Paraguay, my own three-volume *La guerra de la Triple Alianza* attempted to provide a balanced analysis with attention given to all four countries. Ana Squinelo's two-volume *150 Anos Depois*, a focused compilation of articles, principally by Brazilian authors, has stimulated comment for its handling of a variety of topics connected with the war. Finally, another compilation, this one entitled *Uma Tragédia Americana*, and edited by Fernando da Silva Rodrigues and Fernando Velozo Gomes Pedrosa, appeared in 2015 and, in general, can boast the same strengths and weaknesses as that published by Squinelo.¹⁴

It may be somewhat early to judge the impact of these recent studies of the war and the various congresses and scholarly conferences called to discuss the conflict, but no one can doubt that the old times of very limited production are over. There certainly has been no dearth of works on more specific topics touching on the Triple Alliance conflict. Brazilian scholars, for instance, have developed an interesting subfield examining recruitment for the war effort, the principal way in which the conflict stretched its tendrils deep into Brazilian society. Literally dozens of studies trace the economic, political, and social impact of wartime demands for manpower in the empire's far-flung provinces; all underscore the severe social tensions and limited state capacity that wartime recruitment threw into sharp relief.¹⁵

We have also seen published several traditional biographies of figures who were instrumental in shaping the history of their respective countries and who initially gained fame on the battlefields of Paraguay. The role of women, both on the home front and in support of the armies in the field, has increasingly been recognized. So has the role of journalists during the conflict, on the Allied side, where we see efforts both in support and in opposition to the war effort, as well as on the Paraguayan side, where journalism served to inflame a Guaraní-language nationalism. The elaborate victory celebrations in

Brazil, amply covered in the press, have also drawn some attention from historians who are opening a cultural history of the war.¹⁹ And there are also a few new contributions to add to the already ample corpus of work on the diplomatic history of the war.²⁰

The literature on the war's Spanish-speaking belligerents has expanded in many different directions over the last decade. While there is still circulating a variety of shoddy polemical work that fails to meet the standards of rigorous scholarship (such works also appear in Brazil), some excellent publications have recently appeared. These include works on little-known aspects of military organization and analyses of atrocities. Resistance to the Allied war was particularly noteworthy in Entre Ríos, Corrientes, and the provinces of western Argentina, and that theme also continues to inspire attention from scholars. There is even an unusual article that examines the war's effects on the establishment and operation of psychology as a discipline and profession in South America. Clearly, these are halcyon times for the study of the Triple Alliance War, with the new work laying the foundation for future syntheses of the conflict and its multiple impacts on the countries and societies torn by the many years of fighting.

It has been a rewarding business for me to see this transformation in the scholarly literature and to feel that my hunches about the war's significance have been confirmed in the quantity and quality of new works coming to the fore. This year, with the publication of *The Road to Armageddon: Paraguay Versus the Triple Alliance, 1866–1870*,²⁴ I finally bring my major studies of the Paraguayan conflict to a conclusion. It has indeed been a long road, and perhaps it is in order here to explain why it has taken so long and to emphasize once again how much of a debt I owe to other people. I finished much of the research and writing for my study of the last four years of the war back in 2013, when there was considerable pressure for me to bring out a second volume with Nebraska to complete the story. But since the appearance of the first volume, the editors who had promoted its publication had moved on, and their replacements at Nebraska were less interested in a second vol-

ume, which they thought a risky venture in economically tight times in the United States.

Since it was irrational to suppose that another American academic press would publish a second volume when it did not have the first in hand, I endeavored to reconfigure the materials for 1866–1870 in a new and separate study that did not necessarily rely on that first volume. This work, which benefited from much of the new scholarship listed above, also had a difficult time finding a home. One press, reflecting a short-sightedness that was typical of that moment, insisted that I cut another two hundred and fifty pages of text, and when I responded that this would ruin the content and turn the book into just another summary treatment, the press cut me loose. It was a low moment for me, knowing in my gut how important this subject was yet not being able to convince anyone to publish my "big book"—and this in spite of the ongoing praise that it had engendered from its readers. It was an upsetting business, feeling that in my own country I was talking to flat-earthers.

But as it turns out, I was no Sisyphus pushing an impossibly heavy stone up an embankment. I kept looking, and then, eureka! I found the University of Calgary Press. I cannot express with sufficient energy the gratitude I feel for the serious treatment that people at the press gave me throughout the process of getting *The Road to Armageddon* into print. They never insisted that I take a chainsaw to my text. Instead, they offered helpful suggestions and support at every juncture. They learned to appreciate the war in much the same way I had. They also put me together with a talented copy editor, with whom I had many fruitful discussions about elegant writing and how standards can be maintained when people no longer seem to know the difference between "who" and "whom." Above all, the staff at Calgary has been flexible, and this has made all the difference for me. One proof of that flexibility is seen here in their willingness to reissue the earlier volume that had previously appeared with Nebraska (whose staff also deserves my thanks for having facilitated the reversion of rights to me). Now, with both books being given as broad an audience as possible thanks to the University of Calgary Press, I look forward to an even greater expression of interest on the part of the English-language world in a topic that has defined my career. I still say that the Paraguayan War was a catalytic phenomenon that made possible myriad changes in South America. It has also been catalytic for me, personally. For all of the feelings of sadness and tragedy that it summons up, it has helped me see people in a new light, as survivors, and as creative participants in their own destiny.

Thomas Whigham Watkinsville, Georgia November 2017

Notes to Preface

- I have participated in the production of two such television documentaries, *Guerra do Paraguai*. A *Guerra esquecida*, directed by Denis Wright (Raccord & Baderna Producções, 2005) and *A Ultima Guerra do Prata*, directed by Alan Arrais (TV Escola, 2014). Other similar films have been produced, including *Cándido López y los campos de batalla*, directed by José Luis García (Aizenberg Producciones, 2005); *Eliza Lynch*, *Queen of Paraguay*, directed by Alan Gilsenan (Coco Television, 2013); and *Guerra do Paraguai*—*A Nossa Grande Guerra* (History Channel-Latin America, 2015).
- 2 The participants in the Calgary panel agreed to pool their efforts in the subsequent release of a published compilation of their work. See Hendrik Kraay and Thomas L. Whigham, eds., I Die with My Country. Perspectives on the Paraguayan War, 1864–1870 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). An updated edition of this work has only recently been published in Spanish as Muero con mi Patria. Guerra, Estado y sociedad. Paraguay y la Triple Alianza (Asunción: Tiempo de Historia, 2017).
- See Juan Manuel Casal and Thomas L. Whigham, eds., Paraguay: El nacionalismo y la guerra: Actas de las Primeras Jornadas Internacionales de Historia del Paraguay en la Universidad de Montevideo (Asunción: Servilibro y Universidad de Montevideo, 2009); Casal and Whigham, eds., Paraguay en la historia, la literatura, y la memoria: Actas de las II Jornadas Internacionales de Historia del Paraguay en la Universidad de Montevideo (Asunción: Tiempo de Historia y Universidad de Montevideo, 2011); Casal and Whigham, eds. Paraguay: Investigaciones de historia social y política. III Jornadas Internacionales de Historia del Paraguay en la Universidad de Montevideo (Asunción: Tiempo de Historia, 2013); Casal and Whigham, eds. Paraguay. Investigaciones de historia social y política. II: Estudios en homenaje de Jerry W. Cooney (Asunción: Tiempo de Historia, 2016).

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- 4 "La Guerra del Paraguay: Historiografia, representaciones, contextos," whose proceedings appeared in *Nuevo Mundo/Mundos Nuevos* in 2009, http://nuevomundo.revues.org.
- 5 See https://www.estudioshistoricos-en.edu.uy/ixencuentroguerratriplealianza.html.
- 6 Revisionists of the extreme right and left (who have far more in common with each other than the empiricists they tend to condemn) continue to churn out studies and polemics that repeat the "populist" interpretations of the war's causes and conduct. The only real difference with the earlier works is that the newcomers find it harder to distinguish between assertions and facts and display little interest in documentary evidence. See, for instance, Luis Agüero Wagner, *La guerra del Paraguay (análisis breve de la historia real)* (Asunción: Editorial F17, 2006); Felipe E. Bengoechea Rolón, *Humaitá. Estampas de epopeya* (Asunción: Don Bosco, 2008); Leonardo Costagnino, *La Triple Alianza contra los países del Plata* (Buenos Aires: Gazeta Federal, 2011); and Daniel Pelúas and Enrique Piqué, *Crónicas. Guerra de la Triple Alianza y el genocidio paraguayo* (Montevideo: Arca Editorial, 2017).
- 7 "Ňe'émbeweb," ABC Color (Asunción), 13 July 2013.
- 8 Capucine Boidin, "Pour une anthropologie et une histoire regressive de la Guerra de la Triple Alliance (2000–1870)," *Diálogos* 10, no. 1 (2006): 65–87; and, more broadly, see Boidin, *Guerre et métissage au Paraguay, 2001–1767* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes. 2011).
- 9 Ricardo Salles, Guerra do Paraguai: Memórias e imagens (Rio de Janeiro: Edições Biblioteca Nacional, 2003); Pedro Paulo Soares, "A Guerra da Imagen: Iconografia da Guerra do Paraguai na Imprensa Ilustrada Fluminense" (master's thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2003); Miguel Ángel Cuarterolo, "Images of War. Photographers and Sketch Artists of the Triple Alliance Conflict," in Kraay and Whigham, eds., I Die with My Country, 154-178; Mercedes Vigil y Raúl Vallarino, La triple alianza: La guerra contra el Paraguay en imágenes (Montevideo: Planeta, 2007); Augusto Roa Bastos, Memorias de la guerra del Paraguay: La transmigración de Cándido López, frente a frente, el sonámbulo (Asunción: Servilibro, 2009); Antonio María Boero y Ramiro Antonio Boero Ruiz, La guerra del Paraguay: La historia a través de la imágen (Rivera, UY: Museo sin Fronteras, 2005); José Ignacio Garmendia y Miguel Angel de Marco, José Ignacio Garmendia: Crónica en imágenes de la guerra del Paraguay (Buenos Aires: Fundación Universitaria Católica Argentina, 2005); Alberto del Pino Menck, La guerra del Paraguay en fotografías (Montevideo: Biblioteca Nacional, 2008); and Javier Yubi, La Guerra grande: Imágenes de una epopeya (Asunción: El Lector, 2010).
- 10 For examples, see Joaquim Cavalcanti d'Albuquerque Bello, "Diário do Tenente-Coronel Albuquerque Bello: Notas extraídas do caderno de lembranças do autor sobre sua passagem na Guerra do Paraguai," *Documentos Históricos* 112 (2011); Thomas Whigham and Juan Manuel Casal, *La diplomacia estadounidense durante la Guerra de la Triple Alianza: Escritos escogidos de Charles Ames Washburn sobre el Paraguay, 1861–1871* (Asunción: Servilibro, 2008); Whigham and Casal, "El ministro Washburn habla del caudillismo rioplatense," *Estudios Paraguayos* 34, no. 1 (Dec. 2016): 139–151; Agustín Angel Olmedo, *Guerra del Paraguay: Cuadernos de campaña* (Buenos Aires:

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Academia Nacional de la Historia, 2008); Thomas Whigham and Ricardo Scavone Ye-

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Constant: the 'Truth' behind the Paraguayan War," in Kraay and Whigham, eds., *I Die with My Country*, 81–104.

11 For examples, see Pedro Santoni, ed., *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Latin America*:

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For examples, see Pedro Santoni, ed., Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Latin America: From the Wars of Independence to the Central American Civil Wars (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008); Celso Castro, Vitor Izecksohn, and Hendrik Kraay, eds., Nova história militar brasileira (Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV and Editora Bom Texto, 2004); Nicola Foote and René D. Harder Horst, eds., Military Struggle and Identity Formation in Latin America: Race, Nation, and Community during the Liberal Period (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010); Jerry W. Cooney, "Economy and Manpower. Paraguay at War, 1864–1869," in Kraay and Whigham, eds., I Die with My Country, 23–43; Matthew M. Barton, "The Military's Bread and Butter: Food Production in Minas Gerais, Brazil,

Conference, Duke University, Durham, NC, 1 April 2011).

12 Chris Leuchars, *To the Bitter End: Paraguay and the War of the Triple Alliance* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002). Augusto Tasso Fragoso's five-volume *História da Guerra entre a Tríplice Aliança e o Paraguay* (Rio de Janeiro: Biblioteca do Exército, 1957) still has much to teach us today. See also Thomas L. Whigham, "La guerre détruit, la guerre construit. Essai sur le developpement du nationalisme en Amérique du Sud," in *Les guerres du Paraguay aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, ed. Nicolas Richard et al. (Paris: CoLibris, 2007), 23–32.

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13 Francisco Doratioto, *Maldita Guerra: Nueva historia de la Guerra del Paraguay* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2004).

14 Luc Capdevila, Une guerre totale: Paraguay 1864–1870, Essai d'histoire du temps présent (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007); Marco Fano, Il Rombo del Cannone Liberale, vol. 1, Il Paraguay prima della guerra and vol. 2, La guerra del Paraguay (1864– 1870) (Rome, 2008); Thomas L. Whigham, La guerra de la Triple Alianza, 3 vols. (Asun-

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15 For a few examples, see Vitor Izecksohn, "Recrutamento militar no Rio de Janeiro durante a Guerra do Paraguai," in Castro, Izekcsohn, and Kraay, eds., Nova história militar brasileira, 179–208; Miquéias Mugge and Adriano Comissoli, eds., Homens e

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