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## THE AFRO-ARGENTINE OFFICERS OF BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE, 1800-1860

George Reid Andrews\*

In his 1967 work on *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America*, Magnus Morner called attention to the fact that “many individuals of more or less dark skin were able to climb the social ladder because of their military merits” displayed during the Independence wars and after.<sup>1</sup> Citing several individuals of mixed race who reached high rank in the armies of the national period, Morner pointed to military service as one of the more promising avenues of upward mobility for black men in nineteenth century Latin America. On several subsequent occasions he has repeated this theme and called for more research on the role of black men in the Latin American military, and particularly on military service as a path of upward social mobility.<sup>2</sup>

Almost every Latin American country can name at least one or two citizens of African ancestry who experienced promotion to very high military rank as a result of their wartime services.<sup>3</sup> Until the present, however, there has been little effort to make any comprehensive statement concerning the size of the black officer corps in any Latin American army, its institutional development and role in the military establishment, and the opportunity structure for black men in the armed forces. This article addresses those problems, employing as a case study the black officers who served in the army of Buenos Aires province between 1800 and 1860.

Argentina's largest province in terms both of area and population, Buenos Aires, fielded at least twelve all-black battalions and regiments during that period. Black troops from Buenos Aires fought the Spanish in Uruguay, northwestern Argentina and Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Ecuador. In later decades the province's black regiments saw service in the Indian wars, the 1825–1829 War with Brazil, the civil wars which wracked the country until the national unification in 1861, and the Paraguayan War of 1865–1869. There was no shortage of opportunity for black men to demonstrate their military talents. If, therefore, there is little evidence of upward mobility through the ranks, it would be fair to conclude that military service was not necessarily the social ladder that Morner had hypothesized it to be.

Before proceeding further, some clarification of terminology is in order. For the purposes of this article, “Afro-Argentine” and “black” will be used interchangeably to refer to those individuals considered by nineteenth century Argentines to have visible African ancestry. Argentines themselves distinguished between

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*morenos*, people of more or less pure African descent, and *pardos*, those of mixed racial ancestry. These terms were used in military enlistment records, birth, death, and marriage records, and other official documentation, and thus readily identify Afro-Argentines.<sup>4</sup>

The task of studying the province's black officer corps is complicated by the almost universal refusal of Argentine historians to admit that there was such an entity. José Ingenieros, the great Argentine sociologist, stated unequivocally that the soldiers of the Independence wars were almost entirely *mestizos* or blacks, and their officers were always white.<sup>5</sup> Professor Emiliano Endrek concurred, saying that a few Afro-Argentines may have reached officer level during the post-1820 civil wars, but black units of the colonial and independence periods were commanded entirely by white officers.<sup>6</sup> Even a recent groundbreaking work on Afro-Latin Americans by a North American historian stated flatly that "no acknowledged Negroid" held officer rank in the Argentine or Uruguayan colonial militias, and that no black Argentine rose above the rank of captain until after 1820.<sup>7</sup>

It is a curious fact that the very authors who make these assertions include incidental information which strongly suggests, and in some cases conclusively demonstrates, that black men frequently reached command positions. The same essay in which Professor Endrek claims that no blacks served as colonial or Independence period officers includes an 1813 quotation in which General Manuel Belgrano complained bitterly about his black troops. The quotation ends, "my only consolation is that white officers are coming [to command them], under whom perhaps they can be made of some use."<sup>8</sup> The implication is clearly that at that point they were under the command of black officers. Endrek also specifically mentioned the black officers of Córdoba province's Afro-Argentine militia, who were displaced by white officers when the unit was sent to fight in Bolivia.<sup>9</sup> Another case in point is a thesis written at the University of Córdoba in 1972, whose author asserted that black men never became officers but then later quoted an 1830 decree by General Paz that all slave prisoners-of-war were to be returned to their former owners, with the exception of "those slaves who have served as officers in the invading army."<sup>10</sup>

Not only did black men serve as officers in Buenos Aires' army, but some of them rose to high levels of command. It seems to have been an unwritten rule that no Afro-Argentine was to be allowed to reach the rank of general, but at least eleven rose to be colonels or lieutenant colonels; there are undoubtedly more of them concealed in the documentation of that period, waiting to be discovered.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Afro-Argentine colonels could hardly have existed in isolation from an even larger number of Afro-Argentines at lower levels in the hierarchy. The difficulty lies in identifying these men and systematizing their career experiences into some sort of coherent representation of the evolution of the black officer corps. The universe of officers who served in Buenos Aires' battalions from 1800 to 1860 is very large, easily several thousand men. Since the army never commented on the race of these men in regimental rolls, the task of rooting out the

Afro-Argentines in the officer corps appears initially to be impossible, but there are ways to limit the search and make it feasible. Since black officers in white, or heavily white, units appear to have been quite rare, sifting through those units would be for the most part a waste of time; the number of Afro-Argentines one would encounter being insufficient to justify the expenditure of time and energy. One is best advised to stick to the black battalions and examine the make-up of their staffs.

This study employed the monthly roll calls of seven all-black battalions of the 1800–1860 period.<sup>12</sup> All of the seven were infantry units; four of them were regular line units, two were militia (one colonial period and the other national period), and one, the Restorer Battalion, was a mixed unit of militia and line companies. Clearly the heterogeneous nature of these battalions poses analytical problems. For reasons discussed later in this article, it is essential to distinguish between militia officers and line officers—their status within the armed forces was quite different, as were their career patterns. Unfortunately, before 1810 and after 1853 there were no black line units, so the universe of black battalions for those years is limited to militia. A further complication is that militia units were not officered entirely by militia officers. The commanders, and occasionally some lower officers as well, tended to be regular line officers, while subalterns generally held commissions in the militia. When regular officers were assigned to duty in militia units, it was customary for them to hold acting ranks several notches higher than their line rank. For instance, a regular captain commanding militia troops might become an acting major or lieutenant colonel. In order to lessen this confusion, I relied, wherever possible, on the individual's regular line rank. Most of the men in this study held line commissions at one or more points during their lives, making it possible to compare careers over time using consistent data.

The names of every officer mentioned in the battalion rolls produced a crop of 186 men. A variety of sources were used to determine the men's race. These included official service records and evaluations which occasionally mention race, enlistment records which always do, censuses, birth, death, and marriage records, and newspaper articles. Using these data it was possible to establish the race of 104 of the 186 men, somewhat over half. Assignment of racial labels was made conservatively; individuals were placed in given categories only when conclusive evidence argued that they belonged there. This often meant leaving in the unknown category individuals for whom considerable circumstantial evidence existed, but nothing definitive. One tends to suspect that, due to a documentary bias in the data available, the majority of the unknown officers were black. The men for whom it was easiest to get information were those who had the most successful careers and were most prominent in the army and in the society as a whole; and these tended strongly to be whites.

Another complicating factor was the tendency on the part of nineteenth century recordkeepers to cover up evidences of the officers' African ancestry. For instance, one telltale characteristic of colonial documents is that prior to independence black men were not permitted to use the honorific *Don* in front of their

names. This was a privilege reserved for whites and a few select Indians. Thus colonial documents concerning Afro-Argentines conspicuously lack *Dons*. Most striking are the military promotion forms on which a D. was printed before the space in which the name was to be written; in documents concerning black men, this D. is crossed out with a thick black X.<sup>13</sup> In December 1810, however, the revolutionary Junta granted black soldiers and officers official equality with white troops. This meant that black officers could thenceforth give orders to white soldiers and title themselves *Don*.<sup>14</sup> The service files of a number of black officers contain colonial documents which have been subsequently altered, undoubtedly after 1810, somebody having squeezed in a D. before the name, frequently above the line of the script and often in different colored ink from the original.<sup>15</sup>

In this study the absence of the *Don* proved to be a very reliable indicator of race. With only two exceptions, every individual whose colonial period documents lacked the *Don* and whose race could be verified turned out to be either *pardo* or *moreno*. The two exceptions were Indians, showing that the lack of a *Don* is a conclusive sign of non-white racial status. However, this clue is only useful for documents dated prior to 1811. Following that date one must look at other sources, primarily censuses and parish registers. These sources also presented problems. There was considerable variation in the racial labels applied to given officers and/or their relatives. For example, Sublieutenant Bernardo Pintos of the colonial Corps of Indians, Pardos, and Morenos was a successful musician and rather well known figure in the city. Histories of colonial Buenos Aires single him out as a renowned black organist, but in the municipal census of 1810 he was counted as white, complete with a *Don*.<sup>16</sup> When he married in 1828, his marriage certificate was filed in the book reserved for whites, despite the fact that the document specifically labelled him as a *pardo*.<sup>17</sup> Captain Gregorio Sanfines' 1761 baptism certificate describes him as the son of a *moreno* father and a *parda* mother. By the time his son José María Sanfines married in 1813, however, the young Sanfines was eligible to be described on his marriage certificate as an *español*, a white. When the other son, José Gregorio, married in 1816, no mention was made of his race, but when this son and his wife had a daughter in 1824, the original captain's grandchild, her baptism record was inscribed in the book reserved for *españoles*.<sup>18</sup> Thus an Afro-Argentine militia captain produced a white Spanish son and granddaughter. Lieutenant Colonel Cabrera's entire family was labelled as *pardo* in the 1827 municipal census, but by the time his daughter Agueda died in 1881 she had been transformed into a white woman, at least according to the notation of race on her death certificate.<sup>19</sup> Lieutenant Lorenzo Castro was described as a *pardo* in the 1827 census, but the priest who officiated at his 1818 wedding made no mention of his race on the marriage certificate. He is described merely as a native of Caracas and a lieutenant in the regular army, though his wife is labelled as a *parda*.<sup>20</sup>

It is impossible to know who was responsible for these inconsistencies of record. Certainly the officers and their families would have had ample reason for wishing to conceal documentary evidence of their African ancestry, a guarantee of

inferior social status in the nineteenth century city. Alternatively, it is not inconceivable that recordkeepers would have wished to downplay the Afro-Argentine representation in the officer corps. And of course, as military officers the black commanders were figures of some consequence in the community; it would have been decidedly unseemly for the recordkeepers to insist on confronting these men with their non-white heritage. Whatever the motives behind these contradictions in the data, when coupled with the other previously mentioned documentary bias they greatly hinder the reconstruction of the racial composition of the officer corps. This is undoubtedly another contributing factor to the misconceptions concerning Buenos Aires' black officers.

Table 1 describes the distribution of the sample by race and unit. Dates in parentheses indicate the years from which roll call records were taken. Of the 104 officers whose race was verifiable, 39—over a third—were black; sixty-one were white, and four were Indian. If one is willing to assume that the percentage of black officers among the unknowns was much higher than among the knowns, as

TABLE ONE

Racial Composition of Officers in Selected Buenos Aires Battalions, 1800–1860

Unit	Indian	Black	White	Unknown	Total	% Black <sup>1</sup>
Corps of Indians, Pardos, and Morenos (1808)	4	17	2	7	30	74
Battalion of Pardos and Morenos of Upper Peru (1813)	0	3	5	8	16	38
Battalion 7 of Libertos (1814–1815)	0	0	25	14	39	0
Battalion 2 of Cazadores (1817–1820)	0	1	11	7	19	8
Battalion 4 of Cazadores (1829)	0	0	15	14	29	0
Restorer Battalion (1834–1835)	0	6	4	8	18	60
Restorer Battalion (1852)	0	4	0	13	17	100
Battalion 4 of the National Guard (1853)	0	10	2	12	24	83
Total <sup>2</sup>	4	41	64	83	192	38

<sup>1</sup>Column calculated excluding unknowns from total.

<sup>2</sup>Totals exceed sample totals because several officers served in more than one unit.

seems reasonable, it is probably that the black officers made up at least half of the officer corps of the Afro-Argentine battalions.

The distribution of the black officers and their roles in the army show some interesting changes between 1800 and 1860. The first unit considered, the colonial militia Corps of Indians, Pardos, and Morenos, created in 1806 to fight in the English invasions of 1806–1807, was officered almost entirely by blacks and Indians, in complete contradiction of traditional claims that no black men achieved officer rank in the colony. Of the unit's 30 officers, 23 were of known race. Of these 23, only the commander and the second-in-command were white; all the rest were either black or Indian, with black men predominating over Indians 17 to 4. The 1808 roll call of officers from which this list was taken gave only four men in the battalion *Dons*—the two white officers and the two Indian company commanders. It is almost certain, then, that every officer in the battalion from captain on down was a *casta*, a non-white.

These men are from only one colonial militia unit. Of 30 more officers commanding *casta* companies aggregated to the royal artillery during the English invasions, only 6 had *Dons*. The other 24 had no title, implying caste racial status.<sup>21</sup> Officer lists from the black militia companies of the 1770s similarly lacked *Dons*.<sup>22</sup> The conclusion is inescapable: the black militiamen of colonial Buenos Aires were officered by men of their own race.

In 1809 the Corps of Indians, Pardos, and Morenos was reorganized into the Battalion of Castes. When independence was declared in 1810, the battalion's Indian companies were separated and aggregated to white battalions. The remaining black companies were divided into two groups, half of them going to north-western Argentina to form the Battalion of Pardos and Morenos of Upper Peru and half of them going to Uruguay as Regiment Six of Pardos and Morenos.<sup>23</sup> As the Buenos Aires revolutionaries prepared for a long and grueling war with Spain, they recognized that such a war could not be won without the support of those black troops. One of the surest ways of winning their support was to cement the loyalty of the black officers. The officers of the colonial militia therefore experienced immediate promotion as the free blacks were transferred from militia to regular line status. Among the officers of the Battalion of Upper Peru were Inocencio Pesoa, abruptly raised from sublieutenant to lieutenant colonel; José Dionisio Gamboa, raised from sublieutenant to captain; and José Cabrera, who started service as a common soldier and quickly rose to sublieutenant. But the Battalion of Upper Peru was in many ways a disappointing unit for the purposes of this study. Of its sixteen officers, race could be verified for only eight, five of whom were white and three were black. More satisfactory would have been Regiment Six of Pardos and Morenos, whose roll calls were unfortunately not discovered until after this study had already been completed.<sup>24</sup> Of thirty-nine officers in its 1814–1815 roll calls, nine were immediately verifiable as black men, six of whom had served at lower ranks in the colonial militia.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, a list of officers of Regiment Six, published in the *Gaceta de Buenos Aires* in September 1810 before the black officers had won the right to append *Don* to their names,

gave the names of twenty-five officers.<sup>26</sup> Only the two top officers, the definitely white Martín Galán and Miguel Estanislao Soler, were so titled. The rest, including eight black officers from the colonial militia, lacked *Dons* and were therefore almost surely Afro-Argentine.

These two units were composed of free black troops. The bulk of Buenos Aires' revolutionary soldiers, however, were slaves bought by the government under a series of draft decrees issued in 1813, 1815, and 1816. These drafts produced over 2,000 *libertos*, as the drafted slaves were known, who went to form four battalions between 1813 and 1824.<sup>27</sup> This study includes two units of that type, Battalion Seven of *Libertos* and Battalion Two of *Cazadores*. These battalions were officered by fifty-eight men, of whom thirty-seven were of verifiable race. Only one lowly sublieutenant was black; all the rest were white.

There are several explanations for this contrast between the free black battalions and the *liberto* battalions. First, the government was under no political necessity to make black men officers of the slave units. Since the free blacks were accustomed from their colonial experience to serve under black officers, and since they had come to expect that a certain percentage of their number would eventually rise to officer status, the revolutionary government would quickly have alienated free black support by failing to continue this practice. Instead it chose the wiser policy of promoting the free black officers in order to guarantee their allegiance. But no such precedent existed concerning the slaves. The mere promise of freedom, which the *libertos* were to win after fixed terms of service in the revolutionary armies, was sufficient to insure their support for the new regime. Since there had never been slave officers (except during the brief emergency of the English invasions of 1806–1807, when several self-appointed slave officers led the Corps of Slaves into action<sup>28</sup>) there was no need to elevate *libertos* into command positions.

Even more important, keeping the *liberto* regiments officered by whites prevented alliance of any sort between free black officers and the slaves, which the *liberto* troops in essence still were. In 1806 the town council had described the position of commandant of the Corps of Slaves as "one of the most delicate positions imaginable."<sup>29</sup> The last thing the upper echelons of the military and the government wanted was to put slave troops under the command of free black officers, producing a potentially explosive convergence of interests between the two.

The destruction of the free black battalions at the Battle of Sipe-Sipe in 1815 thus marked the end of a brief five-year period in which many Afro-Argentines were granted officerships in the standing army. As free black troops were replaced by *libertos*, the regular black officer corps withered away and, by 1820, had largely disappeared. All line Afro-Argentine units from 1815 to 1830 were officered almost completely by whites. This may be seen in the roll calls of the previously mentioned Second *Cazadores* and the Fourth *Cazadores*. As of 1829 the Fourth was staffed by twenty-nine officers, fifteen are of known race, and every one of them was white. Furthermore, none of the black officers in this study

held line rank during the 1820s; as shall be seen shortly, those who continued their military careers during this decade did so in the militia.

The color bar preventing Afro-Argentines from reaching regular officer status was apparently dropped during the second administration of Governor Rosas (1829–1832, 1835–1852). Roll calls of the all-black Restorer Battalion at the beginning and end of its existence (1834–1835 and 1852) produce a list of thirty-five officers. Of the fourteen who are of known race, four were white and ten were black. This pattern of black dominance was continued in the post-Rosas Battalion Four of the National Guard, the militia unit that went on to fight in the Paraguayan War. Of twenty-four officers in the unit's 1853 rolls, twelve were of known race, two were white and ten were black, including the commander, Colonel Domingo Sosa.

How does one explain the resurrection of the Afro-Argentine officer corps in the 1830–1860 period after its apparent demise between 1815 and 1830? Historians have observed that Governor Rosas actively and successfully sought Afro-Argentine political support for his regime.<sup>30</sup> Just as the revolutionary government of 1810 had bartered officerships for such support, so did Rosas in the 1830s and 1840s, although like the earlier government he allowed only a carefully chosen trio of black men (Manuel Macedonio Barbarín, José Narbona, and Domingo Sosa) to attain the elevated rank of colonel. Furthermore, there is evidence that in the final years of Rosas' administration he reduced the number and ranks of Afro-Argentine officers in his battalions. The 1850 roll calls of the all-black Provisional Battalion show the unit commanded by a major and several of its five companies staffed by only one or two officers, lieutenants or even sublieutenants. A similar situation held in the Restorer, which during Rosas' final year in power was commanded by a mere captain.<sup>31</sup> The governor allowed his black battalions to become understaffed, their officers serving at ranks lower than those to which their responsibilities entitled them. We may speculate that this partially accounts for the black battalions' less than sterling performance at the Battle of Caseros, Rosas' Waterloo.

Another reason for the return of the black officers may be found in the changing legal status of the black population. The municipal census of 1810 had shown that only 22.6 percent of the city's black population was free; by 1827 that proportion had almost tripled to 63.4 percent.<sup>32</sup> This was due to the program of gradual emancipation enacted by the revolutionary government in 1813. As in 1810, the Rosas government found that free black men could be impressed into service, but they would not fight well unless there were genuine opportunities for advancement. Since the need for manpower to fight the Indian and civil wars of the 1830s and 1840s was as great as it had been to fight the Spanish in 1810, the government was forced to cede black men the right to rise through the ranks.

When Governor Rosas came to power he found a readily available supply of potential Afro-Argentine officers in the form of the militia officers. The disappearance of black officers from the 1815–1830 regular units can be deceiving, since it

hides the fact that black men continued to exercise command in the city's militia units throughout that period. A cursory glance at the 1815 officer list of the Civic Regiment of Men of Color reveals a number of black officers from the earlier colonial militia.<sup>33</sup> These officers, later joined by regulars returning from campaigns in the Northwest, continued in the unit until well into the 1820s. Black officers who were later to achieve high rank in the Buenos Aires army all served in the black militia during this period in which their access to regular units was barred. Young Domingo Sosa, after returning from service in Regiment Six, was assigned to duty as a drill instructor in the slave militia, the Argentine Auxiliaries, and in 1828 he was called to duty in the all-black Battalion Four of Militia.<sup>34</sup> Feliciano Mauriño, later to rise to major, served from 1826 to 1834 in the city's various militia units.<sup>35</sup> Even the extraordinarily talented Lorenzo Barcala, Argentina's best known black officer, saw service in the 1825–1829 war with Brazil not in a line unit but in Battalion Four of Militia.<sup>36</sup>

Being restricted to the militia set the Afro-Argentines several ranks lower in the military hierarchy than the white regulars. As previously mentioned, line officers assigned to mobilized militia units were usually elevated one or two ranks above their customary status. Black militia officers always came out on the short end of this arrangement, remaining subordinate to the white regulars. Also, periods of active service in the militia counted toward retirement and pension rights, but period of inactivity did not. Such slack time did count for regular officers, however, enabling them to collect the pensions that often eluded the Afro-Argentines. Finally, line officers were subject at all times to the military *fuero*, military legal jurisdiction, while militia officers were subject to this jurisdiction only while on active duty. Being subject to the *fuero* was considered one of the great privileges of a military career since it made one immune to the civil courts; officers found that their military peers tended to be more lenient in punishing civil offenses than were the civilian courts.<sup>37</sup>

Although the Afro-Argentine militia officers do not appear to have been disadvantaged in relation to white militia officers, their inability to acquire line commissions during the 1820s was clearly the result of a policy of racial exclusion. While not every white man could win a position in the regular officer corps, no black man could. Governor Rosas' allowing the Afro-Argentines back into the ranks of the regulars was therefore of concrete benefit to them.

The original concern of this article was the phenomenon of upward social mobility for black men during the Independence and post-Independence wars. Does the experience of the Afro-Argentine officers indicate that there were opportunities for black men to rise in the society as a result of military service? Viewed purely in terms of military rank, the question would have to be answered in the affirmative; clearly there was opportunity for black men to advance in the army. Not one of the individuals in this sample finished his military service at the same rank at which he entered, and some of them experienced tremendous advancement through the ranks. But these men are by definition a special group, and their

careers reflect nothing concerning the thousands of black soldiers who started service as enlisted men and finished service as enlisted men, or, if they were lucky, perhaps as corporals or sergeants.

It is also clear that the Afro-Argentines' race had an adverse effect on their possibilities for advancement. A tabulation of the highest known rank reached by each individual in Table 2 shows that the average black officer in service between 1800 and 1860 was most likely to end his career as a captain, while the average white officer was most likely to end his as a colonel. No black man achieved the rank of general, while ten percent of the whites did. And the increasing difficulty that black men had in winning promotions past the rank of captain can be seen in the fact that there were fewer black majors and lieutenant colonels than captains, and fewer black colonels than lieutenant colonels. Among the whites, there were more lieutenant colonels than majors or captains, and even more colonels than lieutenant colonels.

In discussing upward mobility, it is necessary to distinguish between militia officers, part-time soldiers who exercised other trades or occupations in order to support themselves, and the regulars, the full-time career officers. It appears that the militia officers were men who already enjoyed high standing in the black community, though they were by no means elite within the context of Buenos Aires society as a whole. It was understood in the colonial and nineteenth century city that a black man could best hope for a secure and moderate prosperity and social acceptance by exercising one of two occupations: that of musician or that of skilled craftsman.<sup>38</sup> With this point in mind, it is interesting to discover the large percentage of black militia officers who followed one or the other of those occupations. An 1807 petition from nineteen officers of the Corps of Indians, Pardos, and Morenos to protest a reduction in their pay noted in passing that they were almost all skilled craftsmen.

TABLE TWO  
Highest Known Rank Achieved by Individuals in Sample

	Indian	Black	White	Total
General	0	0	6	6
Colonel	0	2	16	18
Lieutenant Colonel	0	5	12	17
Major	1	5	7	13
Captain	1	13	10	24
Lieutenant	0	9	7	16
Sublieutenant	2	5	3	10
Total	4	39	61	104

... holding in our hands the majority of the workshops in this city, we have been obliged to abandon them in order to perform the Service that the government demands of us; the Salary that we have received up until now is far inferior to the earnings of our trades, which our being mobilized has deprived us of entirely.<sup>39</sup>

Two black officers who subsequently became lieutenant colonels paid for the uniforming and equipping of squadrons of militiamen out of their earnings as craftsmen, one as a silversmith, and the other at an unnamed trade.<sup>40</sup> When Anastasio Sosa, an officer in the colonial and national period militia, died in 1830, the major object of value he left to his heirs was his mason's workshop.<sup>41</sup> Casimiro Mendoza is described in the 1827 census as a master cobbler.<sup>42</sup>

A startling number of black men in the 1810 census listed dual professions of militia officer and musician.<sup>43</sup> Some of the officers included in this sample were very well known musicians in nineteenth century Buenos Aires, such as the organist Bernardo Pintos and the composers Tiburcio Silvarrios and Casildo Thompson.

The militia officers therefore seem to have come from the more comfortable economic stratum of the black community. This may also be seen in the fact that several of them left officially probated wills, a time-consuming and expensive legal luxury that few Afro-Argentines could afford to indulge themselves in.<sup>44</sup> Why would men who already enjoyed a certain level of economic well-being want to be militia officers? For one thing, there were the rights and privileges associated with military service, such as the military *fuero* and the possibility of winning a pension. Second, there is no question that holding an officership in the militia gave a man additional prestige in the community.<sup>45</sup> This explains why it was not uncommon for Afro-Argentine officers to offer to serve without pay in such units, or to outfit and equip soldiers at their own expense so that they would then be appointed as the soldiers' commanding officer. As late as the 1870s the status of the militia officers remained high, as may be seen in the frequent mention of their actions in the Afro-Argentine press.<sup>46</sup>

But the militia officers seldom rose high on the military ladder. For the most part they remained confined to the ranks of lieutenant or captain. The men who became majors and colonels were not the artisans and musicians who signed up for service in order to lend social luster to their names; rather they tended to be men who started service at a very young age and at a low rank, men whose only trade was that of arms. Their backgrounds tended to be severely disadvantaged: Lorenzo Barcala, born a slave; Manuel Barbarín, born free in Africa but brought to Buenos Aires as a slave; Manuel Barbarín, born free in Africa but brought to Buenos Aires as a slave; Domingo Sosa and Feliciano Mauriño, illegitimate sons of poverty-stricken mothers. These were the men who really hurled themselves into the military life and rose the highest. The economic benefits of such a career were minimal. If anything it was a good way to lose money since officers frequently had to pay for their own equipment, food, and supplies. Casildo Thompson was the only black colonel to leave a probated will, and though his estate was a large one, it was heavily mortgaged at the time of his death and much

of it had to be sold.<sup>47</sup> Domingo Sosa's non-probated will shows that all he left after six decades of military service was a small sum of money and the house he shared with his brother-in-law Feliciano Mauriño.<sup>48</sup> Colonel José María Morales was forced in the 1870s to open a stall for the sale of pork in the municipal market in order to supplement his income.<sup>49</sup>

In economic terms military service was not a path of upward mobility. But socially and politically it could most definitely be a means of advancement. How else but by becoming a high-ranking officer could an Afro-Argentine expect to be introduced to the Emperor of Brazil, as Estanislao Maldones was in Paraguay? Of the three black men who served as provincial legislators in nineteenth century Buenos Aires, two, Domingo Sosa and José María Morales, were colonels. And it was only through military service that men like Nicolás Carbrera, Manuel Barbarín, José Narbona, and Pablo Irrazábal were able to become friends and associates of governors, with their political activities and eventually their deaths reported and commented on in the Buenos Aires press.

It is clear, however, that the black officers never completely escaped the social stigma of their race. An incident in the life of Lorenzo Barcala suggests the treatment accorded even high-ranking black men. Holding the rank of colonel, Barcala was invited to a ball held at a provincial capital in which he was stationed. Once arrived he was subjected to snubs and insults so cutting that he left in disgust. His superior officer, General Lavalle, demonstrated his displeasure by leaving with Barcala, but one may speculate that such occurrences were not uncommon in the lives of the black officers.<sup>50</sup> During the political disturbances of 1820 Lieutenant Colonel Cabrera's racial background did not escape comment, and he was vilified in the Buenos Aires papers as "the *pardo* Cabrera" and "unworthy [by reason of] the low principles of his depraved background."<sup>51</sup> When Lieutenant Colonel Barbarín died in 1836, his obituary in the government newspaper was so perfunctory that "several friends of the deceased Lieutenant Colonel of Regulars, D. Manuel M. Barbarín" felt compelled to write a more detailed account of his life and achievements, which was then published in the paper.<sup>52</sup> In short, though it is difficult to make any sort of comprehensive statement concerning the social position of the black officers, it appears that the formal and informal racial constraints left intact from the colonial period consigned the black officers to a social status inferior to that of their white counterparts.

Doubtless in response to the discrimination they suffered in their military careers and their daily lives, the Afro-Argentine officers formed a tightly knit social group held together by friendships and associations that carried over into their non-military lives. José María Morales was the godfather of Estanislao Maldones' son.<sup>53</sup> When Morales married in 1848, Ezequiel Navarro, who later served with him in Battalion Four of the National Guard, was his best man.<sup>54</sup> Lieutenant Colonel José Narbona performed the same role at Casildo Thompson's wedding in 1848.<sup>55</sup> When Ignacio Liston died in 1860, his friend and fellow officer Raymundo Llanos signed the death certificate as witness.<sup>56</sup> When Federico Mauriño retired from service in 1867, he mentioned two reasons for doing so: his broken health

and his obligation to take care of the family of the recently deceased Domingo Sosa.<sup>57</sup> Mauriño's obligation to Sosa's family was especially strong since he was the colonel's nephew: sometime in the 1820s Sosa had married Petrona Mauriño, the sister of Feliciano Mauriño, a friend and fellow officer of Sosa's.<sup>58</sup>

Further strengthening these ties was the tendency for more than one generation of given families to make a career of military service. Estanislao Maldones arranged for his son to enter the Colegio Militar in 1870. Estanislao, Jr. eventually became a major in the regular army.<sup>59</sup> Sublieutenant Silvestre San Martín of the Restorer Battalion was the son of José San Martín, who had served as an officer in the colonial militia and Regiment Six of Pardos and Morenos.<sup>60</sup> Juan and Mariano Sarlo were a father and son who served together in the same unit, the Corps of Indians, Pardos and Morenos.<sup>61</sup> Similar cases were the Barbaríns of the Restorer Battalion and the Silvarrios of Battalion Four of the National Guard. The foremost Afro-Argentine military family was that formed by the union of the Sosa and Mauriño families. Domingo Sosa was the son of Agustín Sosa, Buenos Aires' first black lieutenant colonel. The young Sosa had no children who reached adulthood, but his brother-in-law, Major Feliciano Mauriño, produced a son and grandson who rose to be a captain and a colonel, respectively. The generations of this Afro-Argentine military family thus covered almost two centuries of Argentine history.<sup>62</sup>

The prestige accorded members of this military class by the rest of the black community was very high. As early in his career as 1825 Domingo Sosa was being called on to witness and preside over the elections of the mutual aid society formed by members of the Mina nation of West Africa, a society to which he did not even belong.<sup>63</sup> Shortly after Sosa's death he was honored by the formation of an Afro-Argentine social club called the Club Coronel Sosa, just as Colonel Barcala was memorialized several years later by the Club Lorenzo Barcala.<sup>64</sup> Of the fifteen prominent Afro-Argentines included by Jorge Miguel Ford in his 1899 biographical anthology *Worthies of My Race*, nine were military officers.<sup>65</sup>

It is undeniable that military service could and did provide an avenue of upward mobility for those black men skilled and determined enough to make their way to the top. An Afro-Argentine male looking to rise as high in the society as he possibly could go was probably best advised to join the army and bend his talents toward acquiring a colonelcy. But such a man would have been deluding himself if he did not recognize that the odds against his reaching that goal were extremely long, that access to the topmost levels of command would be forever closed to him because of his race, and that even if he were lucky enough to rise as high as a black man could go, his political influence and social prestige would never be as great as those of his white equals, and both could be cut short at any moment by political reversals or violent death. Men seeking less spectacular but more secure advancement were better off mastering a more reliable and less hazardous trade than that of arms. Then, following the attainment of a certain level of economic success, the holding of a lieutenantcy or captaincy in the militia might add further prestige to one's social position.

Staking one's future entirely on military service was a poor gamble. Only a tiny fraction of the men who made such a wager came out winners, which means that their achievement in winning high rank was all the more extraordinary. Although it is clear that Afro-Argentines served their country not only as soldiers but as officers as well, their record of leadership has been consistently passed over by historians. One may speculate that black men served the other nations of North and South America in similar capacities and that they lie forgotten in the documents of the hemisphere's archives, waiting to be discovered and restored to their rightful place in the history of the Americas.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Magnus Morner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (Boston, 1967), p. 89.

<sup>2</sup>Magnus Morner (ed.), *Race and Class in Latin America* (New York, 1970), pp. 229-230; Magnus Morner, "Recent Research on Negro Slavery and Abolition in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review*, XIII, 2 (1978), p. 279, n. 49.

<sup>3</sup>Some examples are Brazil's Vicente Ferreira de Guedez, Chile's José Romero, Mexico's Vicente Guerrero, Argentina's Lorenzo Barcala, and Uruguay's Feliciano González. David M. Cohen and Jack P. Greene (eds.), *Neither Slave Nor Free* (Baltimore, 1972), pp. 311-312; Guillermo Feliu Cruz, *La Abolición de la Esclavitud en Chile* (Santiago, 1942), pp. 194-225; Leslie Rout, Jr., *The African Experience in Spanish America* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 171-172, 362-363, n. 69; Ildefonso Pereda Valdés, *Negros esclavos y negros libres* (Montevideo, 1941), p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>See Marta Goldberg, "La población negra y mulata de la ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1810-1840," *Desarrollo Económico*, XVI, 61 (April-June 1976), pp. 81-82, n. 25; Emiliano Endrek, *El Mestizaje en Córdoba, Siglo XVIII y Principios del XIX* (Córdoba, 1966), pp. 22-27; José Luis Masini, *La Esclavitud Negra en Mendoza* (Mendoza, 1962), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup>José Ingenieros, *La Locura en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1937), p. 30, n. 3.

<sup>6</sup>Endrek, p. 83.

<sup>7</sup>Rout, pp. 151, 171.

<sup>8</sup>Endrek, p. 83.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>10</sup>Nelly Beatriz López, "La Esclavitud en Córdoba, 1790-1853," (unpublished *tesis de licenciatura*, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, 1972), pp. 78-69.

<sup>11</sup>Lieutenant Colonels Manuel Macedonio Barbarín (1781-1836), Nicolás Cabrera (1780-1832), Estanislao Maldones (1826-1876), José Narbona (?-1850), Inocencio Pesoa (c. 1775-?), Agustín Sosa (1755-c. 1820), and Casildo Thompson (1826-1873); Colonels Lorenzo Barcala (1795-1835), Pablo Irrazábal (1819-1869), José María Morales (1818-1894), and Domingo Sosa (1788-1866). Biographies of Barbarín, Barcala, Irrazábal, Maldones, Morales, and Domingo Sosa may be found in Jacinto Yaben, *Biografías Argentinas y Sudamericanas* (Buenos Aires, 1938-1940), 5 vols.

<sup>12</sup>The units, the time periods from which the rolls were taken, and the location of the rolls, are: Corps of Indians, Pardos, and Morenos (1808), Archivo General de la Nación (henceforth AGN), IX 26-7-6, fojas 436-437; Battalion of Pardos and Morenos of Upper Peru (1813), AGN, X 35-10-2; Battalion 7 of Libertos (1814-1815), AGN, III 44-2-1; Battalion 2 of Cazadores (1817-1820), AGN, X 10-2-5; Battalion 4 of Cazadores (1829), AGN, III 45-4-2; Restorer Battalion (1834-1835), AGN, III 5-1-3; Restorer Battalion (1852), AGN, III 56-1-2; Battalion 4 of the National Guard (1853), AGN, III 56-1-12.

<sup>13</sup>See for instance AGN, IX 12-5-3, foja 339; IX 26-7-4, fojas 173, 174.

<sup>14</sup>Comando General del Ejército Argentino, *Reseña Histórica y Orgánica del Ejército Argentino* (Buenos Aires, 1972), I, pp. 149-150; M.F. Mantilla, *Páginas Históricas* (Buenos Aires, 1890), pp. 365-366.

<sup>15</sup>See for instance AGN, IX 8-4-2, fojas 189, 231.

<sup>16</sup>Francisco Romay, *El Barrio de Monserrat* (Buenos Aires, 1971), p. 69; AGN, IX 10-7-1, *cuartel* 14; IX 8-4-2, fojas 197, 255.

<sup>17</sup>Parish of Monserrat, Libro 3 de Matrimonios, foja 120.

<sup>18</sup>Parish of La Merced, Libro 9 de Bautismos de Color, foja 372v; Parish of Monserrat, Libro 2 de Matrimonios, foja 369v and 414v, and Libro 5 de Bautismos de Españoles, foja 176v.

<sup>19</sup>Archivo General del Ejército (henceforth AGE), Legajo Personal 2338.

<sup>20</sup>Parish of Monserrat, Libro 2 de Matrimonios, foja 480v.

<sup>21</sup>AGN, IX 26-7-6, fojas 412–413.

<sup>22</sup>AGN, Interior Legajo 21, exp. 6.

<sup>23</sup>Adolfo Saldías, *Los Números de Línea del Ejército Argentino* (Buenos Aires, 1912), I, pp. 202–203; Mantilla, pp. 360–366.

<sup>24</sup>I did not discover the roll calls of Regiment Six until two weeks before my departure from Argentina. It was therefore not possible to subject the names in the rolls to the careful crosschecking undergone by the officers in the sample. As mentioned in the text, several were immediately recognizable as black officers in other units I had studied.

<sup>25</sup>AGN, III 44-1-15.

<sup>26</sup>*Gaceta de Buenos Aires (1810–1821), Reimpresión Facsimilar* (Buenos Aires, 1910–1913), I, p. 420.

<sup>27</sup>The slave drafts are described in Marta B. Goldberg de Flichman and Laura Beatriz Jany, “Algunos Problemas Referentes a la Situación del Esclavo en el Río de la Plata,” *IV Congreso Internacional de Historia de América* (Buenos Aires, 1966), VI, pp. 65–71.

<sup>28</sup>AGN, IX 26-7-5, fojas 208–222; IX 26-7-6, foja 356; José Luis Lanuza, *Morenada* (Buenos Aires, 1967), pp. 62–66.

<sup>29</sup>*Acuerdos del Extinguido Cabildo de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires, 1907–1934), IV, II, LXI, p. 476.

<sup>30</sup>See Lanuza, pp. 120–127; Rout, pp. 190–191; José María Ramos Mejía, *Rosas y Su Tiempo* (Buenos Aires, 1907), I, pp. 274–275, 286–288, 330–340.

<sup>31</sup>AGN, III 11-1-1; III 56-1-12.

<sup>32</sup>Taken from stratified samples of the 1810 and 1827 municipal censuses conducted by the author. The original manuscripts of the censuses are located in AGN, IX 10-7-1, X 23-5-5, 23-5-6.

<sup>33</sup>*Gaceta de Buenos Aires*, IV, p. 338.

<sup>34</sup>Yaben, V., p. 727.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, III, p. 708.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, I, p. 468.

<sup>37</sup>For a description of the *fuero* see Lyle McAlister, *The ‘Fuero Militar’ in New Spain, 1764–1800* (Gainesville, 1957).

<sup>38</sup>See Lanuza, pp. 98–100.

<sup>39</sup>AGN, IX 24-4-9, exp. 4.

<sup>40</sup>AGN, IX 24-5-4, exp. 1; IX 13-1-1, fojas 306–307.

<sup>41</sup>AGN, Sucesiones 8152, Testamentaria de D. Anastasio Sosa, 1830.

<sup>42</sup>AGN, X 23-5-5, *cuartel* 27, Montevideo 44.

<sup>43</sup>In *cuartel* 17 alone, see Captains José Joaquín de Anzaga and Atanasio Serna, and Lieutenant Manuel de los Santos. AGN, IX 10-7-1.

<sup>44</sup>See the wills of Silvestre San Martín, AGN, Sucesiones 873; Juan Sarlo, Sucesiones 8160; Anastasio Sosa, Sucesiones 8152; Hilario Valdivia, Sucesiones 8607; Raymundo Llanos, Sucesiones 6590.

<sup>45</sup>For the status of black militia officers in New Orleans, see Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters* (New York, 1974) p. 125. For Colombia, see Allan J. Kuethe, “The Status of the Free Pardo in the Disciplined Militia of New Granada,” *Journal of Negro History*, LVI, 2 (April 1971), pp. 105–117.

<sup>46</sup>Militia officers regularly appeared in the gossip columns of the papers. They often received lengthy obituaries, as for example Guadalupe Viera (“Lamentable desgracia,” *La Igualdad*, May 31, 1874, p. 1) and Raymundo Llanos (*La Igualdad*, March 29, 1874, p. 3). See all the December 1873 issues of *La Igualdad* for front-page articles on who should succeed Casildo Thompson as commander of the all-black Batallion Two of Regiment Three of the National Guard.

<sup>47</sup>AGN, Sucesiones 8498, Testamentaria de D. Casildo Thompson.

<sup>48</sup>AGN, Sucesiones 6873, Testamentaria de Ciriaco Mauriño, 1869.

<sup>49</sup>*La Broma* (August 22, 1878), p. 3.

<sup>50</sup>Jorge Miguel Ford, *Beneméritos de mi estirpe* (La Plata, 1899), p. 4.

<sup>51</sup>*Gaceta de Buenos Aires*, VI, p. 93.

<sup>52</sup>*Gaceta Mercantil* (March 7, 1836), p. 3; (May 24, 1836), p. 2.

<sup>53</sup>AGE, Legajo Personal 14991.

<sup>54</sup>Parish of Socorro, Libro de Matrimonios de Gente de Color, foja 27v.

<sup>55</sup>AGN, Sucesiones 8498, Testamentaria de D. Casildo Thompson.

<sup>56</sup>AGE, Legajo Personal 6918.

<sup>57</sup>AGE, Legajo Personal 7849.

<sup>58</sup>AGN, Sucesiones 6873, Testamentaria de Ciriaco Mauriño, 1869.

<sup>59</sup>AGE, Legajo Personal 14991.

<sup>60</sup>AGN, IX 10-7-1, *cuartel* 18; III 44-2-7.

<sup>61</sup>AGN, IX 10-7-1, *cuartel* 18.

<sup>62</sup>AGE, Legajo Personal 7850.

<sup>63</sup>Romay, pp. 66-67.

<sup>64</sup>“Club Barcala,” *La Broma* (August 11, 1882), p. 1.

<sup>65</sup>See note 50.

<sup>66</sup>Jack D. Foner’s excellent *Blacks and the Military in American History* (New York, 1974) is a revision of Afro-American military history in the United States. I know of no comparable monograph for Latin America.