In This Issue

This issue of the *Hispanic American Historical Review* presents four articles on female economic participation in Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil. As landowners, shopkeepers, merchants, borrowers, lenders, servants, and "household managers," women took an active part in the development of local, regional, and national economies. In so doing, they also created contradictory images and symbols of female initiative and submission, morality and transgression, defiance and subordination.

Building on recent research on colonial women as economic actors, Pablo Lacoste examines female entrepreneurs in the wine industry of Mendoza, Argentina: specifically, female owners of vineyards, wineries, and *pulperías*. Owing to Mendoza's soil and climate, the province was a center of wine production from the 1600s on. Its strategic position on the overland trade route from Buenos Aires to Santiago also made it a major transport center—an "inland port," in Lacoste's words. The constant movement of travelers, merchants, and muleteers through the province generated strong demand for food, drink, and other goods sold at pulperías; and the extended absences of the city's males on journeys across the pampa opened opportunities for women to operate and in some cases to own not just pulperías but vineyards and wineries as well. By the first half of the 1800s women owned 17 percent of the vineyards in the province and 14 percent of the pulperías, thus giving the lie, Lacoste suggests, to contemporary portrayals of women as sheltered innocents.

Shifting our attention to Mexico, Francie R. Chassen-López introduces us to one female entrepreneur, the larger-than-life Juana Catarina Romero. Born in poverty in Tehuantepec in 1837, Romero initially earned her living as a street vendor. Selling cigarettes and other items to Liberal troops during the civil wars of the 1850s, Romero became a close ally and lifelong friend of Liberal commander and future president Porfirio Díaz. She opened her first store in the 1860s and was soon a major importer and retailer, traveling to the United States and Europe to seek out suppliers of cloth, wine, crystal, glassware, and other products. By the 1880s she had diversified into sugar production, visiting

Hispanic American Historical Review 88:3
Copyright 2008 by Duke University Press

Downloaded from https://read.dukeupress.edu/hahr/article-pdf/88/3/357/375834/HAHR883_02_Intro.pdf
by guest
on 20 February 2019

Cuba to study the island's most advanced sugar mills. By 1900 she had become a formidable economic and political force in Oaxaca, lobbying successfully for the construction of the Tehuantepec National Railway, persuading the local archbishop to make Tehuantepec a bishopric, and building and maintaining two Catholic schools in the city. Through the clothing sold at her department store La Istmeña, Romero helped create the supposedly traditional styles of Tehuantepec indigenous dress that were later popularized by Frida Kahlo and other Mexico City trendsetters. At her death in 1915, Romero left a fortune of almost half a million pesos and a legendary history as a provincial cacica.

One of the factors contributing to Romero's business success was that, having never married, she was free to sign contracts and business agreements on her own behalf. As Juliette Levy explains in her analysis of female participation in the nineteenth-century Yucatán mortgage market, under Mexican law married women could own property but could not buy, sell, rent, or mortgage it without their husband's consent. Because of these restrictions, Levy finds, female moneylenders (another line of business favored by Juana Romero) were overwhelmingly widows, who made loans comparable in size (though fewer in number) to those made by male lenders. Female borrowers, in contrast, tended to be married women who borrowed not on their own behalf but as surrogates for their husbands. Men with no property of their own, or insufficient property to guarantee a loan, could call on their wives to pledge their own property as collateral. Interpreting this tactic as evidence of the husband's questionable prospects, lenders demanded higher interest rates for such loans, and got them. That premium constituted a "marriage penalty" that arose, Levy suggests, not in spite of the law's efforts to protect wives from "rapacious foreclosure" but rather because of them.

One of Juana Catarina Romero's many acts of philanthropy was the founding and sustaining of two Catholic schools for boys and girls. Olívia Maria Gomes da Cunha considers a similar institution in Brazil: the Escola Doméstica Nossa Senhora do Amparo in Petrópolis. Founded in 1871 by a Catholic priest and still offering instruction today in the arts of domestic service, the school was simultaneously an effort to rescue young girls from lives of poverty and prostitution and to meet Brazilian society's growing demand for domestic workers as slavery came to an end. The school thus formed part of a larger effort by Brazilian educators and elites to prepare the transition from a slave society, in which domestic work was closely associated with forced labor, to more modern and civilized (literally, "domesticated") arrangements based on scientific household management and wage labor. Mistresses and servants both needed to be trained and educated in those new arrangements, the former through newspaper and

Downloaded from https://read.dukeupress.edu/hahr/article-pdf/88/3/357/375834/HAHR883_02_Intro.pdf
by guest
on 20 February 2019

magazine articles, the latter through apprenticeships and programs like those at the Escola Doméstica. Meanwhile, legislators, jurists, and bureaucrats wrestled with the knotty question of whether and how the state should regulate domestic work. To what degree did state responsibility for maintaining public order and preventing workplace abuses (whether by employers or employees) extend into the private sphere of the home? These debates, goals, and policies, along with the actions, attitudes, and behavior of servants and mistresses, all combined to shape new forms of domestic service and domestic intimacy that, despite their supposed modernity, remained strongly influenced by the heritage of slavery.

Downloaded from https://read.dukeupress.edu/hahr/article-pdf/88/3/357/375834/HAHR883_02_Intro.pdf
by guest
on 20 February 2019

Downloaded from https://read.dukeupress.edu/hahr/article-pdf/88/3/357/375834/HAHR883_02_Intro.pdf
by guest
on 20 February 2019