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Abstracts

DEBORAH BESSEGHINI, *The Space of Imperialism: An Informal Consul on the Banks of the River Plate, 1808-1820*

This study retraces a significant story about both Hispanic America's position in the British "Imperial Meridian" and Britain's contribution to South American independence. The story tells about Robert Ponsonby Staples, and it pulls back the curtain on initiatives and negotiations that influenced the political reconfiguration of South America and established sufficient western bases of "imperial security" for Britain's world empire. Staples was the cadet son of an Irish ex-member of Parliament with family ties to both Castlereagh and Wellington. He was appointed consul in Buenos Aires in 1811, acting informally as a confidential agent for the Foreign Office. His story helps us both investigate the role of "imperial" agents in Hispanic America and reflect on the margin of influence wielded by the great powers before the new states were recognised. This influence was even greater if exercised by unofficial envoys, bounded solely to their patrons and free to explicitly pursue undeclared interests of the mother country. Staples acted within a political space that we could define as an "intermediate area" between what agents were able to do and Britain's official policy. According to the author, the unofficial policy is the realm of "informal imperialism". This political (not economic) category heretofore used infrequently for the independence era is, on the contrary, particularly suitable in contexts of political reconfiguration when power was mainly exerted to create an acceptable new order in the imperial interest. Moreover, research conducted in European and American archives has uncovered evidence of concrete British support to San Martín's liberation campaigns, between private and public initiatives.

Keywords:

Robert Ponsonby Staples

British Informal Imperialism

South American Independence