

# *GUERRA SUCIA:* ARGENTINA'S DIRTY WAR

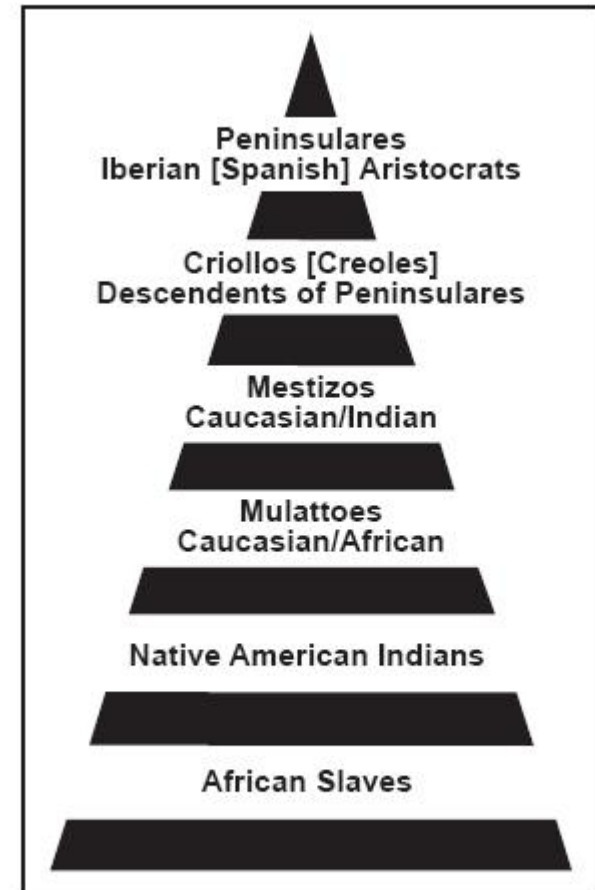
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# INEQUALITY & LATIN AMERICA

“Latin America is much more unequal than other regions. The reason is history. European colonisation set a pattern of exploitation of indigenous Indians. Its legacy, and that of slavery, live on. This helps to explain the ethnic character of some of the region's inequality.”

– [\*The Economist\*](#)

**Social Classes in Spanish Colonies**



Source: John Osborne et al., *Global Studies*,  
N & N Publishing (adapted)

# THINK-PAIR-SHARE



- ❓ Why do you think it's important to think about economic and social inequality when discussing Latin America?
- ❓ What impact do you think inequality has on what we're about to study?

# THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE & THE COLD WAR

- Throughout the 1950s & 60s political and economic problems helped lead to widespread unrest throughout much of Latin & South America.
- In 1959, Cuba became the first communist government in the Western Hemisphere by overthrowing a US backed dictator, Fulgencio Batista.
- The US was afraid that with support from Cuba and the USSR, more countries in the Western Hemisphere would turn to communism.



*Fidel Castro Celebrates  
Victory in Cuba*



# ALLIANCE FOR PROGRESS

- President Kennedy proposed an “Alliance for Progress”, a 10 year plan which would provide:
  - economic aid
  - military aid (counterinsurgency)
- The goal of the economic aid was to combat inequality through
  - Improving education & combating illiteracy
  - Improving Industrial productivity & land use
  - Improving public health
  - Price stability
  - Establishment of democratic governments



Venezuelan President Rómulo Betancourt and U.S. President John F. Kennedy at La Morita, Venezuela, during an official meeting for the Alliance for Progress in 1961

# ALLIANCE FOR PROGRESS

- The goal of military aid was to combat communism using a two pronged approach:
  1. The US military would prevent any external communist invasions or threats.
  2. Latin American armies would defend against the “internal enemies of freedom”.
    - Referred to as **counterinsurgency**

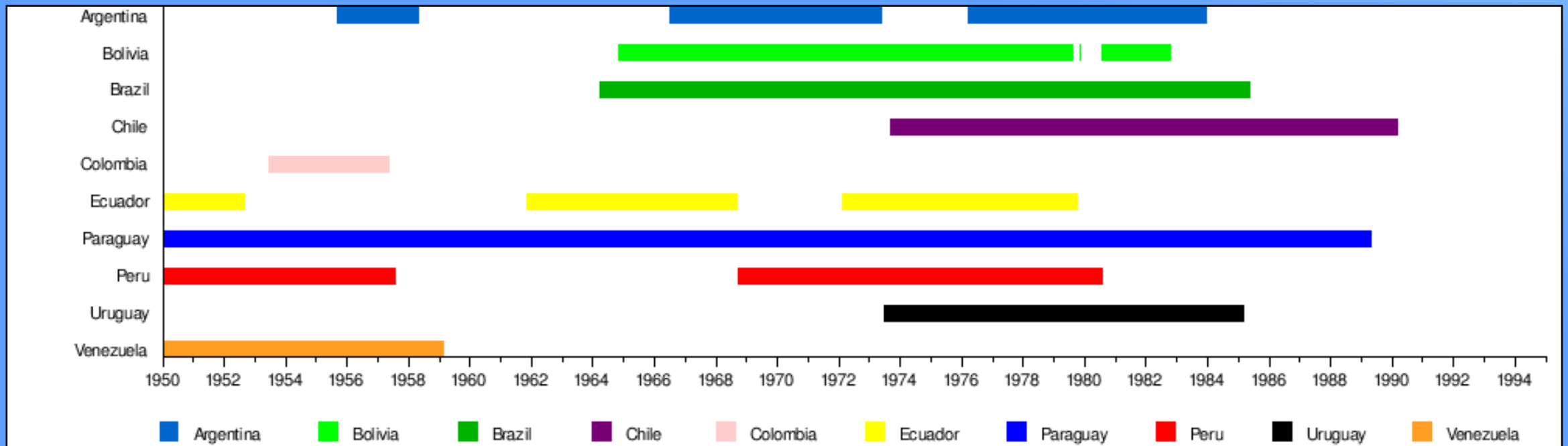


# ALLIANCE FOR PROGRESS: RESULTS

- Although some gains were made by the 1970s (improvements to public health and higher literacy rates), many of the economic plans were deemed a failure
  - Inequality was still high
  - Price stability and economic growth didn't last
- This was due to multiple factors:
  - Resistance to land and economic reforms by wealthy elites and US business interests
  - Insufficient US aid
  - Lack of US focus on the region
  - The rise of anti-democratic military dictatorships

# MILITARY DICTATORSHIPS IN LATIN AMERICA

- Ironically, much of the military aid provided by the US, allowed these anti-democratic military regimes to gain political power.
  - Building democratic governments became less important than fighting communists.



# FEATURES OF MILITARY DICTATORSHIPS

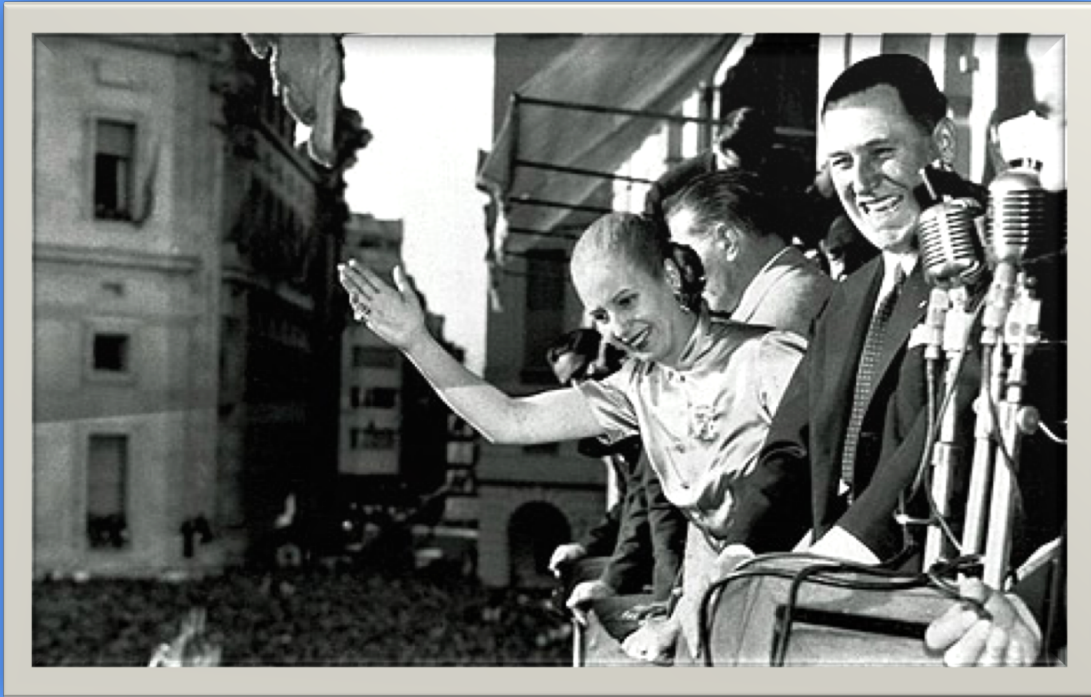
- Many of these dictatorships brutally repressed their people and cracked down on any type of political expression.
- In many cases, enemies of the state could include:
  - Political parties
  - Labor unions
  - Schools and Universities
  - Professional associations
  - Journalists
- Any dissent was met with harsh retaliation.
  - Torture
  - Exile
  - Incarceration
  - Execution
  - Rape

# THINK-PAIR-SHARE



- ❓ Why do you think the US was worried about Latin American countries turning towards communism?
- ❓ How might the Alliance for Progress prevent countries from turning to communism?
- ❓ Do you think the Alliance for Progress was a good idea? Why or why not?
- ❓ Why do you think the Alliance for Progress failed to help Latin America?
- ❓ How do you think the United States government reacted to the rise of military dictatorships across Latin America?

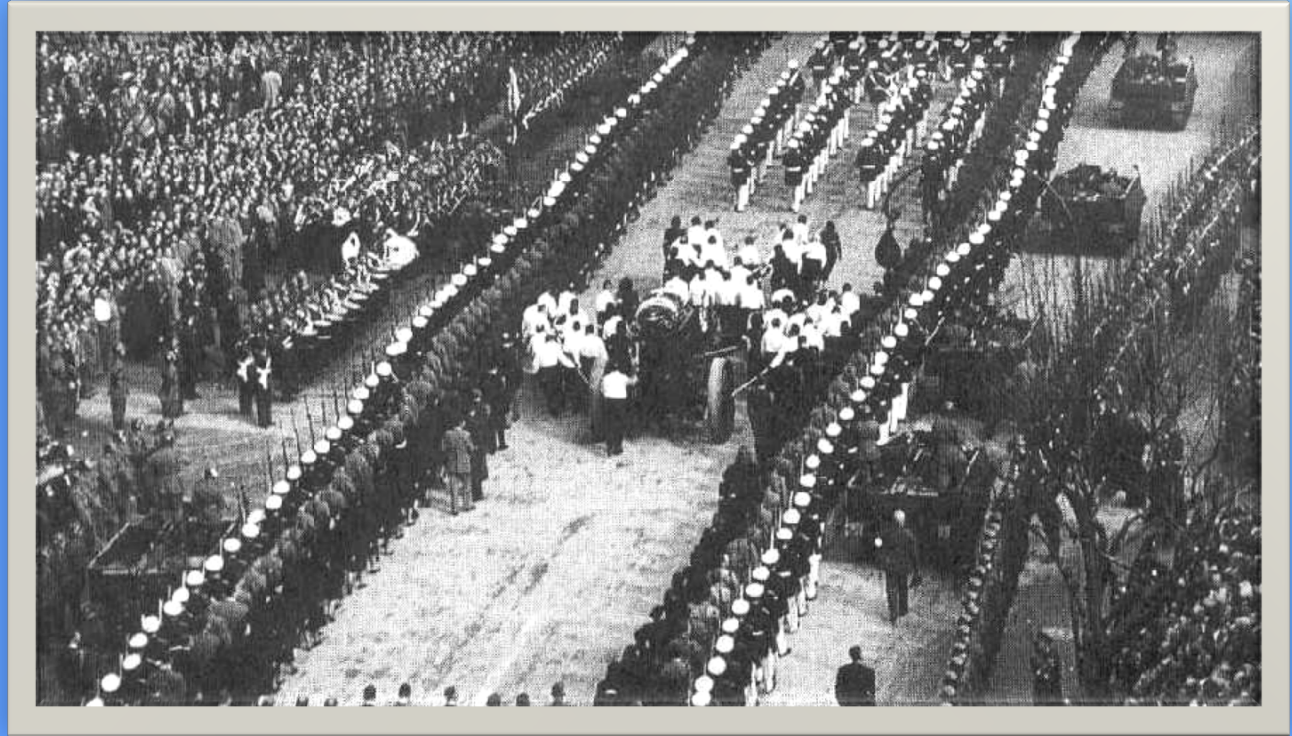
# THE PERÓN DECADE



- Juan Peron was a popular, yet controversial, military leader elected to the presidency in 1946.
- Although he ruled by decree, he and his wife, Evita, were very popular.
- While president he:
  - Established a political movement, “Peronism”, which united left & right wing political movements
  - legitimized trade unions
  - extended political rights to the working class
  - secured voting rights for women
  - opened university education to all capable Argentinians.

# THE PERÓN DECADE

- Economic difficulties and rising inflation in undermined Perón's presidency in the early 1950s. Evita's death in 1952 further hurt his popularity.
- In 1955, he was deposed by a military coup and was exiled to Spain.



*Evita's funeral*

# ARGENTINA IN THE 60S & 70S

- A series of civilian governments and military governments took power throughout the 1960s.
  - Both sought to ban or severely limit Perónism (Justicialist Party).
  - Many of the reforms Perón implemented were repealed.
- This period was marked by instability and by rampant antigovernment feelings:
  - Economic problems
  - Strikes
  - Protests
  - Riots
  - Political kidnappings
  - Guerrilla warfare against the state by leftist groups
  - Violence against leftist groups by right wing groups



*The Montoneros were a communist guerilla group that kidnapped and murdered various government officials*

# RETURN OF PERÓN

- In the early 1970s, the military government relaxed restrictions on the Perónistas.
  - In 1973, Hector Cámpora, a Perón loyalist, was elected president.
  - He resigned a few months after being elected, paving the way for Juan Peron's return.
- Perón was an ineffective president due to chronic illness and he died in 1974.
  - His wife, Isabel, became president upon his death.



*Perón's funeral*



*Isabel Perón*

# PRESIDENCY OF ISABEL PERÓN

- While president, Isabel created the “Triple A” (Alianza Argentina Anticomunista), a death squad to take on revolutionary groups.
  - Suspected of killing at least 1,100 people.
  - Wiped out the Montoneros.
- She was unpopular due to corruption and failure to tackle Argentina’s problems.
- In 1976, she was deposed by a military coup. She was arrested and placed under house arrest. She was exiled to Spain in 1981 and still lives there today.

# MILITARY JUNTA

- Led by General Jorge Rafael Videla
- Original aim was to restore social order
- Initially supported by much of the press & public



# THINK-PAIR-SHARE



- ❓ Why do you think the military deposed Perón in 1955?
- ❓ Why do you think the various governments (civilian & military) during the 1950s & 60s placed restrictions on Perónism?
- ❓ What role do you think the Cold War played in Argentina in the 1960s?
- ❓ Why do you think Isabel Perón created a death squad? How might this influence Argentina's politics later?
- ❓ Why do you think many Argentiniens supported the junta at first?

# DIRTY WAR (1976 – 1983)

- What began as an attempt to restore order, quickly turned into war on Argentina's own citizens.
- El Proceso – “the Process” or the reorganization – a period of wide-scale repression of the general public:
  - Trade unionists
  - Students
  - Intellectuals
  - Journalists
  - Writers
  - Human rights activists



# DIRTY WAR (1976 – 1983)

- Methods of suppression
  - Incarceration
  - Torture
  - Rape
  - Killing
  - Kidnapping
- Two methods were specific to the Dirty War:



*Los Desaparecidos or the disappeared*

1. Death flights – prisoners were executed by being thrown out of airplanes alive.
2. The children of “los desaparecidos” were taken from their parents and given to supporters of the junta.

# DIRTY WAR (1976 – 1983)

- Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo & Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo
  - Two human rights groups made up of the mothers and grandmothers of the disappeared.
  - Plaza de Mayo is the main square in Buenos Aires and it is the focal point of political life in Argentina.
  - Led protests against the human rights abuses committed by the junta
  - Some were “disappeared”



*The symbol of Las Madres & Las Abuelas – a white headscarf – in Plaza de Mayo*

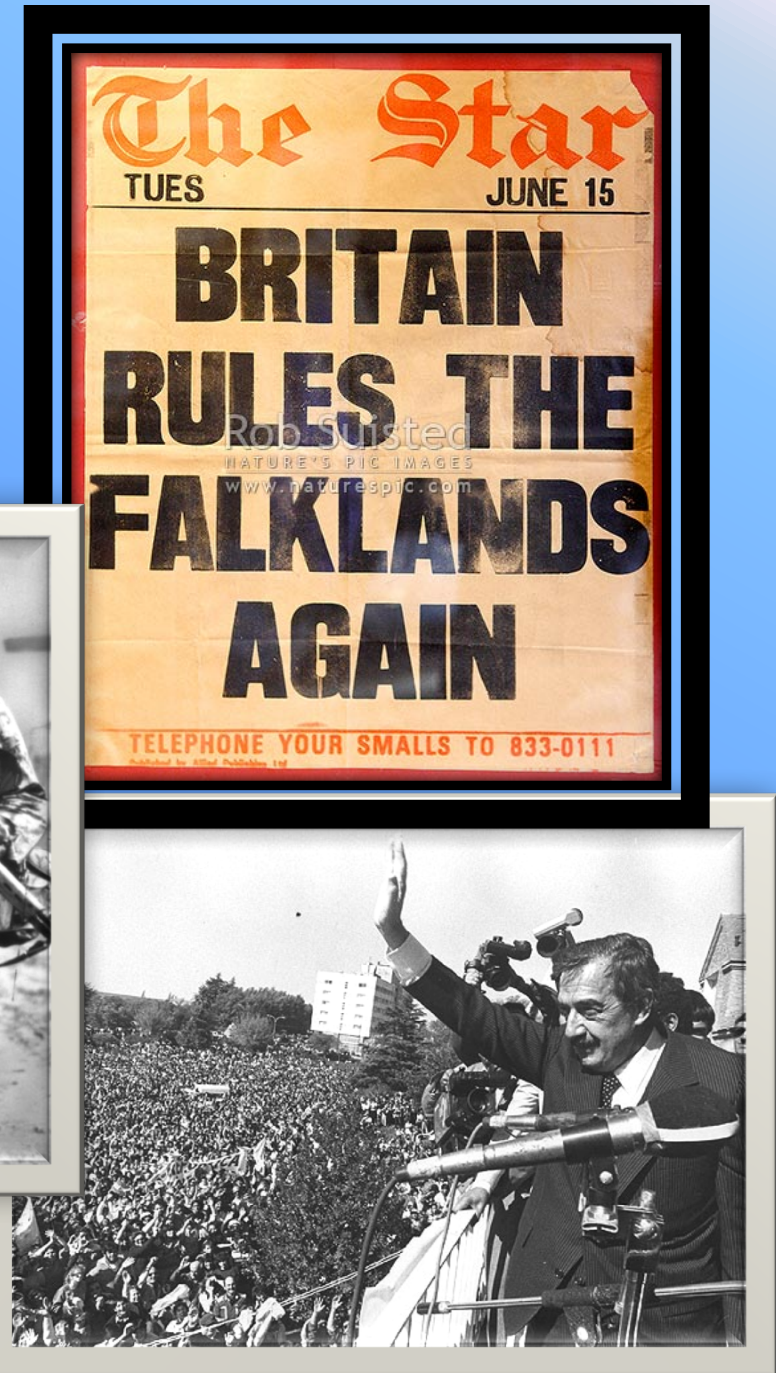
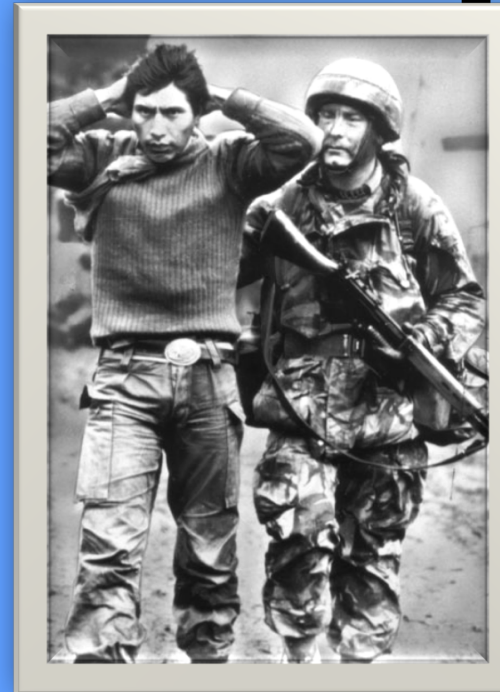
# FALKLANDS/MALVINAS WAR



- The junta did little to improve the problems facing Argentina:
  - Widespread social unrest
  - Economic decline
- In 1981, General Leopoldo Galtieri became president.
- To distract from Argentina's problems, he launched an invasion of the British controlled Falkland Islands in 1982.
- Many Argentines initially supported the invasion because they believed that the Falkland Islands should belong to Argentina, not Britain.
  - Malvinas is what the Argentines call the Islands.

# FALKLAND/MALVINAS WAR

- The war was a disaster for Argentina.
  - Their army surrendered in 74 days
- This failure ended the junta's control over Argentina.
- In 1983, Raúl Alfonsín (a civilian) was elected president.



# THINK-PAIR-SHARE



- ❓ Why do you think Isabel Perón's government and the junta used extra legal means to deal with the guerillas and other people they deemed subversives?
- ❓ Why do you think that the junta began to expand its Dirty War operations to citizens who weren't guerillas?
- ❓ What role did the Falkland War play in ending the Dirty War?
- ❓ Why do you think it is referred to as the Dirty War? What name would you use?
- ❓ What do you think present day Argentinian's are doing to remember the victims of the Dirty War?

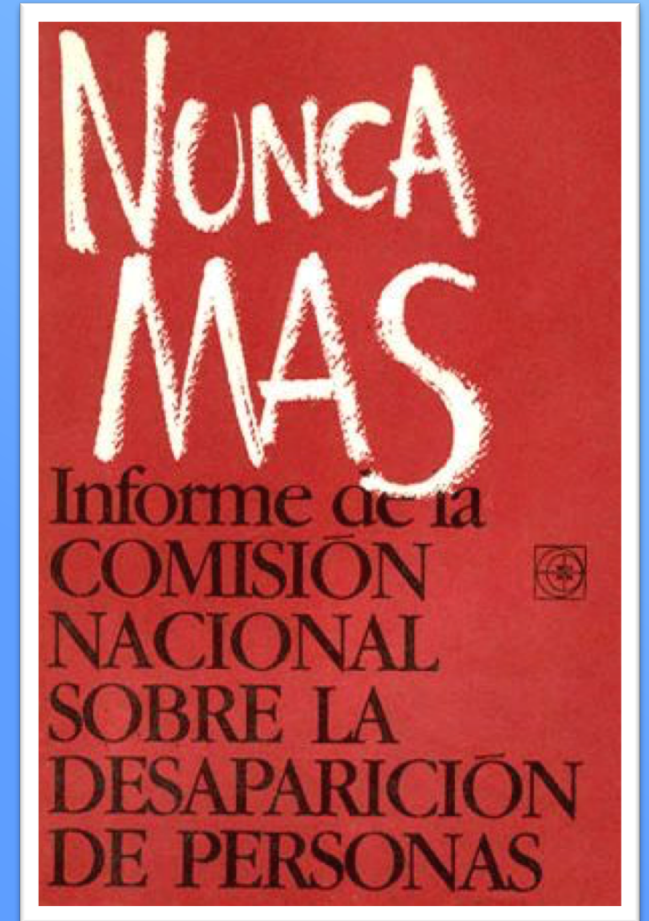
# AFTERMATH OF THE DIRTY WAR



- National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons
  - An organization investigated the fate of the disappeared.
  - *Nunca Mas* – the report issued by the Commission
- After the report, Alfonsín attempted to prosecute the perpetrators of the Dirty War
- The government successfully tried high-ranking officials, including Jorge Videla.

# AFTERMATH OF THE DIRTY WAR

- In response to the prosecutions, several junior officers started uprisings in various parts of the country.
- In 1986 and 1987, Congress passed the Pardon Laws, the Final Line and Due Obedience, which ended prosecutions of military and security officers for crimes committed during the military dictatorship.
- In 1990, after five years in prison, General Videla and other high ranking officials were pardoned, despite the public's opposition.



# AFTERMATH OF THE DIRTY WAR

- In 2005, a judge ruled that the pardon laws were unconstitutional and Videla was placed under house arrest in 2006.
- In 2010, he was put on trial again for human rights violations. He was convicted and sent to prison.
- In 2012, he was convicted of kidnapping the children of the disappeared.
- He died in prison in 2013.

# AFTERMATH OF THE DIRTY WAR

- From 2005 to 2011, 259 people were convicted of crimes relating to the Dirty War.
- Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo still continue their work trying to locate their grandchildren.
- As of 2013, 109 of the 500 suspected children have been identified.

# REMEMBERING THE DIRTY WAR

- In 2006, 24 March was designated as a public holiday in Argentina, the *Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice*.
- On the 30th anniversary of the coup, a huge crowd filled the streets to remember what happened during the military government, and ensure it did not happen again.
- It was announced in 2007 that the the Navy School of Mechanics (ESMA) – a notorious detention and torture center – would become a museum to honor the victims of the Dirty War.



# THINK-PAIR-SHARE



- ? If you were a citizen of Argentina, how do you think you would react to the Dirty War (support, protest, stay silent, etc.)? Why?
- ? The United States has long been involved in the affairs of many Latin American nations (Monroe Doctrine, Roosevelt Corollary, Bay of Pigs Invasion, etc.) Do you think the United States was aware of the Dirty War? If so, how do you think the US responded?
- ? Based upon world events of the 1950s – 80s, why might the US view the junta as an ally, despite their known human rights abuses?

# US & THE DIRTY WAR

- By 1976, the US Congress was considering placing economic sanctions on Argentina for human rights abuses.
- Around the same time, US Ambassador, Robert Hill, pressed the military to stop its human rights abuses, but he was told that the junta had Washington's support.
- Secretly, US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger assured the junta that President Nixon supported what they were doing.

“Look, our basic attitude is that we would like you to succeed. I have an old-fashioned view that friends ought to be supported. What is not understood in the United States is that you have a civil war. We read about human rights problems but not the context. The quicker you succeed, the better. The human rights problem is a growing one. Your ambassador can apprise you. We want a stable situation. We won't cause you unnecessary difficulties. If you can finish before Congress gets back, the better. Whatever freedoms you could restore would help.”

*Henry Kissinger to Argentine Foreign Minister, Augusto Guzzetti; October 1976*



# US & THE DIRTY WAR

- In 1976, **President Jimmy Carter** was elected.
- During his one term he refocused US foreign policy to include more emphasis on human rights.
- He publicly condemned the junta's human rights abuses and imposed sanctions upon the military.



- In 1980, **President Ronald Reagan** was elected.
- His foreign policy took a more hardline approach to communism and he established friendlier relations with the junta.



# LAS ABULEAS DE PLAZA DE MAYO & THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

This film tells the story of Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, an Argentinian human rights organization of grandmothers committed to finding their lost grandchildren. They believe these grandchildren were stolen by their government during the country's military dictatorship from 1976-1983, a period in Argentina's history referred to as the Dirty War.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MpAuPwIA7o&feature=youtu.be>

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