

Global Friday Presents

From Argentina to Upper Canada: The Rhetoric of Anti-Imperialism in Sir Francis Bond Head's Argentine and Canadian Writings

February 17, 2023

Sir Francis Bond Head (1793–1875) is nowadays best known for his controversial tenure as lieutenant governor of Upper Canada from 1836 to 1838. Often blamed for the outbreak of the Upper Canada Rebellion and justly criticized for his efforts to remove Anishinaabe people from their traditional territories, Head cuts a sorry figure in Canadian historiography. This negative assessment is in stark contrast, however, to scholarship on Head's earlier Argentine period, during which time he led the Rio Plata Mining Association's efforts to exploit a series of Andean gold and silver mines. Despite Head's status as an agent of European capitalism, scholars of nineteenth-century South America have praised his sympathetic depictions of Indigenous people and his criticisms of European colonialism. Focusing on his bestselling 1826 Argentine travelogue, my talk will investigate Head's criticism of imperialist ideology, including his willingness to consider his own complicities with the oppressive practices he otherwise denounces. Ultimately, I will argue, Head's Argentine writings demonstrate a self-reflexive critical promise that he failed to enact during his tenure as lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada.



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