

Julio Argentino Roca, Buenos Aires



What may be the most controversial statue in Buenos Aires, a city of statues, is the statue to Julio Argentino Roca.

Roca, Argentina's President from 1880 to 1886 and again from 1898 to 1904, was commissioned almost thirty years after he died. Roca didn't have a good track record when it came to human rights and that's where the controversy lies.

While Roca was Minister of War, he led a campaign known as the "Conquest of the Desert." Roca wanted to take control of land in the southern part of the country and strengthen its position against Chile.

So far, so good. Where Roca went too far was in calling for the capture and removal of all the native tribes that lived in Southern Argentina. Over 1,200 Indians were killed, and 15,000 more put in prison during Roca's dominion.

The artist, Uruguayan sculptor Jose Zorrilla, created the statue so that Roca stands ominously "as someone a person would not to get on the bad side of. Despite being the subject of so much hate, there are a few around who feel honoring the ex-president is justified.

"In his time he was admired," a bystander told me. "It was a different era from the one we are in now. You can't change history."