

During the fall 2014 semester, I wrote my research paper “Mothers with a Cause: The Political Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo” for Brandi Townsend’s course Hist208B: Historical Research and Methods Seminar; Latin American Revolutions. History majors are required to take a section of Hist208 in order to get an introduction to historical methods. In Hist208B, I learned how to conduct and synthesize historical research, and then I used those skills to write a paper about Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo. I chose to take the Latin American Revolutions section of Hist208 because I took the course Hist251: Latin America Since Independence my freshman year and enjoyed learning about the region. Although the United States has always been deeply involved in the politics of Latin America, I did not learn much about U.S. involvement in the region in my high school history courses.

During 1976 until 1983, a military dictatorship ruled Argentina. Around 30,000 leftists were “disappeared” and executed. A group of women began demonstrating outside of the Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires’ political center, and demanded information from the military government about their missing children. Eventually, the women—Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo—became a full-fledged human rights organization known worldwide.

I decided early on while taking Hist208B that I wanted to study Las Madres for my research paper. I first watched footage of one of Las Madres’ weekly demonstrations in Hist251, and I found their devotion to be incredibly inspiring, especially when their activism could lead them to a fate not unlike their children’s.

I learned how to utilize University of Maryland libraries resources during a class session with Patricia Herron. She gave a thorough introduction to using the library catalog, databases and WorldCat. Finding scholarship about Las Madres was easy due to the wide variety of resources available through these sources.

I first began my research by making some basic searches on the WorldCat UMD catalog. I discovered that a significant amount of scholarship on Las Madres focuses on the sphere of women’s influence in politics within the context of motherhood and domesticity. Naturally, most scholarship about Las Madres was focuses on gender analysis. However, I did not want to get caught up in debating whether or not Las Madres were feminists or just women active in the public sphere. I did not want to debate whether Las Madres were apolitical mothers or empowered political activists either. Instead, I argued that Las Madres used their status as mothers to their advantage and effectively evolved to a human rights organization active in a wide scope of social issues as time went on.

In interviews I found through WorldCat UMD and databases like JSTOR, I found that some members self-identified as feminists and others did not, while both expressed support in basic feminist principles. Las Madres can’t be adequately defined through blanket statements. I attempted to understand them

on their own terms and examined how they perceived themselves over time by looking at their own Interviews, and memoirs in particular. Also, I watched the dramatic film *La Historia Oficial* and a clip of the band U2 performing their song "Mothers of the Disappeared." Studying Las Madres through non-academic mediums helped me examine them in a wider context, through popular culture.

I selected by sources with an interdisciplinary viewpoint in mind. Instead of only looking at scholarship written about Las Madres by historians, I also read articles and books written by academics from a range of discipline, including film studies, geography, Latin American studies, political science and women's and gender studies. By taking this approach, I felt like I had fuller grasp of Las Madres' history, experience and impact.

This was the first major research paper I had to write for a history course. It took a lot of hard work and patience. Refining my thesis was particularly challenging. After reading and learning so much about Las Madres, it was to know where to begin. With Brandi's guidance, I was able to craft a strong thesis that incorporated all my research and guided the rest of my paper. Talking through what I learned helped me figure out what direction I wanted to go with my paper. Thinking critically about my work pushed me to create a strong finished product. With this experience under my belt, I will definitely be ready to tackle Hist408, the history major's capstone research methods course. My research would not have been possible without university library catalog sources and subscriptions to such a large variety of databases. I would love if all books and articles listed in catalogs were available to view instantly online. I know that would be a huge undertaking, but such a feature would be incredibly helpful.