




## The Importance of Córdoba's Reform to the Latin American Academic Context: One Hundred Years of Contribution

Elisabete Monteiro Aguiar Pereira<sup>1</sup>   
<sup>1</sup>Universidade Estadual de Campinas

### ABSTRACT

The article presents the social, political, economic and educational contexts of the Córdoba movement of 1918, whose centenary is celebrated in 2018. It analyzes these contexts in their historical development as the background of the outbreak of the reform of Córdoba and publication of the document known as the 'Liminar Manifest', or document of the Córdoba University Reform. The central point of the article is to analyze the importance that the movement had at that time and the reasons of its permanent influence in the student movements in these ten decades of existence, in several countries of Latin America, becoming an important legacy for the students and an equally important call for the particular organization of a Latin American university with a look at its specific social, cultural and educational issues.


### KEYWORDS

Córdoba Reform. Student movement of Córdoba. Cordoba Manifest. University reform - 1918.

Corresponding to Author

<sup>1</sup> Elisabete Monteiro Aguiar Pereira  
 E-mail: [eaguiar@unicamp.br](mailto:eaguiar@unicamp.br)  
 Universidade Estadual de Campinas,  
 Brasil  
 CV Lattes  
<http://lattes.cnpq.br/6205064013011021>

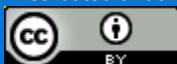
Submitted: 05 Nov. 2018  
 Accepted: 22 Jan. 2019  
 Published: 16 Feb. 2019

 10.20396/riesup.v5i0.8653900  
 e-location: e019037  
 ISSN 2446-9424

Anti-plagiarism Check



Distributed under



## A Importância da Reforma de Córdoba para o Contexto Acadêmico Latino-Americano: Cem Anos de Contribuição

### RESUMO

O artigo apresenta os contextos social, político, econômico e educacional do movimento de Córdoba de 1918, cujo centenário se comemora em 2018. Analisa esses contextos no seu desenvolvimento histórico como bastidores da eclosão da reforma de Córdoba e publicação do documento conhecido como Manifesto Liminar, ou documento da Reforma Universitária de Córdoba. O ponto central do artigo é o de analisar a importância que o movimento teve naquele tempo e as razões da sua influência permanente nos movimentos estudantis nestas dez décadas de existência, em vários países da América Latina, tornando-se um importante legado para os estudantes e um igualmente importante chamado para a organização particular de um universidade latino-americana com olhar para suas específicas questões sociais, culturais e educacionais.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Reforma de Córdoba. Movimento estudantil de Córdoba. Manifesto de Córdoba. Reforma universitária de 1918.

## La Importancia de la Reforma de Córdoba para el Contexto Académico Latinoamericano: Cem Años de Contribución

### RESUMEN

El artículo presenta los contextos social, político, económico y educativo del movimiento de Córdoba de 1918, cuyo centenario se conmemora en 2018. Analiza estos contextos en su desarrollo histórico como bastidores de la eclosión de la reforma de Córdoba y publicación del documento conocido como 'Manifesto Liminar', o documento de la Reforma Universitaria de Córdoba. El punto central del artículo es el de analizar la importancia que el movimiento tuvo en aquel tiempo y las razones de su influencia permanente en los movimientos estudiantiles en estas diez décadas de existencia en varios países de América Latina convirtiéndose en un importante legado para los estudiantes y un igualmente importante llamado para la organización particular de una universidad latinoamericana con mirar sus específicas cuestiones sociales, culturales y educativas.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Reforma de Córdoba. Movimiento estudiantil de Córdoba. Manifesto de Córdoba. Reforma universitaria - 1918.

## Introduction

The movement that became known as the Córdoba Reform of 1918 retains its importance after 100 years. Its significance is related to its flags, which are, to this day, the basis of all the movements that defend the public university in all the university movements of Latin America. In June 2018 we celebrated its centenary. By its extension and intensity, it was a movement never seen previously in Latin American academic context.

At that time, its importance was due to the cultural, political and educational restructuring that it triggered in several countries of Latin America. In Brazil, due to not having a university system at that time, we were going to feel its influence in the years of 1968, a period in which the Brazilian' students made similar demands and sought to retake what the Córdoba movement had called "implement a Latin American university". This statement is found in the original text, which gave publicity to the movement. It is entitled "The Argentine Youth of Cordoba to Free Men of South America (MANIFESTO of June 21, 1918)" (p.198). In this article we explore this text in its contribution to the student claims that have been made since then, in the universities of Latin America. The analysis is not intended to be original, since the text has been explored in these 100 years of existence, but to bring into consideration its influence on student political action since then.

## The Movement of Reform of Cordoba and its Contexts

The University of Cordoba, founded in 1613, is the oldest in Argentina and the fourth created in Spanish America. Thus, on the occasion of the Cordoba Reform, it had 305 years of existence, and Argentina had four other national universities: Buenos Aires (1812), Santa Fé (1889), La Plata (1890), and Tucumán (1912). The universities in the Spanish colonies preceded from universities in the English colonies. By way of comparison, Harvard University, which is the first American university, was founded in 1636 (CLARK, 1992).

In the sixteenth century, on the occasion of the great navigations and conquests of lands, mainly by Spain, England and Portugal, the existing universities were in greater number in Spain, that counted on twelve universities. England had three and Portugal one - the University of Coimbra, founded in 1308. Spain was a society that was concerned with the issue of higher education, which may explain why its colonies had universities much earlier than the English and Portuguese colonies. This can be seen in the number of universities in these countries at the end of the 16th century. Spain had thirty-two universities, England five and Portugal two (ROSSATO, 1998; PEREIRA, 2008).

The foundations dates of the first universities in Latin American countries that were Spanish colonies, give the dimension of this importance. The first university founded by the Spaniards was that of Santo Domingo, in the present Dominican Republic, in 1538, only forty-six years after its discovery.

The University of Cordoba, on the occasion of the Reform Movement (1918), had 305 years of existence, which offered a critical mass of student experience. In this period, the University of Cordoba had had two other academic reforms, but none reached the intensity and solidity of the 1918' movement, whose spirit of reform was projected far beyond the country, expanding to other Latin American countries (BONAVITA *et al.*, 2007 ).

The first reform of the University of Cordoba was in 1767 when the Jesuits, who administered it since the beginning, were expelled from the administration by a resolution of King Carlos III. For a century and a half, the Jesuits had preserved the university with an exclusively theological-philosophical profile (BERNHEIM, 1998). In his studies, Silva (2007) points out that the Society of Jesus settled in the capital of the province of Córdoba at the end of 1599, and settled in an educational-spiritual complex called "Jesuit Manzana" (Jesuit Mansion), developing intense work in the education area, where they created the College Maximum in 1610, the University of Cordoba in 1613, and the College of Monserrat in 1687. For him, this "sectarian spirit persisted throughout the years in the colony, and even then, in the Latin American republics of the nineteenth century "(p.6).

The course of Theology and Philosophy lasted eleven semesters and was based on the Aristotle teachings. The Jesuit spirit, which dominated the whole structure of the university, had less appreciation for areas such as mathematics, physics, public law, languages, music. The Jesuits were often criticized for keeping the university cloistered, insensitive to the society transformations and resistant to the new science, keeping it conservative and resistant to changes in the social, economic, cultural, and political world. One of the preserved practices in the university was the lifelong professorship, the dogmatic and bookish teaching, considered outdated and distant from the dynamic transformations of the world (BERNHEIM, 1998).

The Jesuits led the university until 1767, when they were expelled by Resolution of King Carlos III, and it was passed to the Franciscans who created the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences in 1791. They promoted modifications in the curricula, but these were also taken out from university administration by the secular clergy. Dr. Gregorio Funes was appointed as the rector, considered as a more accessible intellectual to the development of sciences and techniques, inaugurating a more progressive and open period. (BIAGINI, 2000). As a consequence, profound reforms have taken place in studies' curricula with the introduction of new subject such as arithmetic, algebra and geometry. Other achievements were the entry of women in 1884 and the enactment of Law No. 1597, in 1885, known as Lei Avellaneda. The original project of the Avellaneda law contemplated the universities with autonomous government, resources, freedom and periodicity of chair, support to research, teaching methods modernization and co-management. For Borches (2008), this Law "gave the Executive Power of the Faculty the condition of modifying statutes and appointing teachers" (p.2).

The third reform was the Cordoba Movement of 1918, whose landmark was to culminate in a document, the claims that had been generated in the previous years due to dissatisfaction with the conservatism of the teachings that did not incorporate the new scientific knowledge. The Movement, which has a formal date on June 21, 1918, was preceded by assemblies and street mobilizations and created the Pro-reform Committee on March 10, 1918. This Committee later became the Federation University of Córdoba (FUC). After, a general student strike began on March 31, 1918. The strike movement expanded throughout the country with other students supporting the demands of Córdoba (TCACH, 2012). The movement also had the support of unions, left political parties and intellectuals. Within the University of Córdoba many teachers supported the students, although they could not express support openly.

It is known the main passage of this movement that launches the important and historical “Liminar Manifest” with the title "The Argentine youth of Cordova to the freemen of South America" on June 21. The document is a letter of principles for a change in the university that was considered unfair and unequal. The students sought the democratization of the university and made a call for the construction of a more united, democratic and integrated Latin America.

According to the analysis of the political-educational context, other aspects contributed to the outbreak of this movement. Besides considering the university regime anachronistic, the students resented the teaching regime far from the scientific achievements. Romo and Mühlenbrock (2017) point out that the new incoming teachers follow the same method. This was seen as the absence of free teaching and as an obstacle to the renewal of teaching and learning methods. Students in this context were fighting, for a university autonomy, understanding it as the only way for the university to have freedom to grow and meet its needs. They also questioned the authoritarianism of the choice of leaders that was not made through election by the academic community.

In the social aspect, the university was not free and only the privileged socioeconomic class could attend it. The students understood that the university should be democratic, free and give assistance for the permanence of underprivileged students (ROMO; MÜHLENBROCK, 2017).

The “Liminar Manifest” represents the manifestation of the central points of this process of seeking to reform the University of Córdoba, but the influence of the claimed aspects, exceeded the regional limits. According to Bernheim (1998), the student movement at the University of Córdoba has expanded beyond Argentine borders, influencing other young people in several countries of South America, who also fought in defense of higher education. The Manifesto becomes, from then on, in an important document in the history of Latin American universities.

The value of this centennial document is to concretize and shape the struggles that were happening and clarity to the wishes of the students who defended it. In analyzing the document, it appears to bring an entirely new aspect in defending an university more closely

related to social problems and to seek solutions for them. The Cordoba reform movement is thus inserted in a social, political, cultural and educational context, whose understanding is fundamental to understand all that it has represented in these 100 years. We shall briefly describe these contexts and their relation to the students' claims in the Cordoba Reform Document or "Liminar Manifest".

## The Socio-Political Context

In the political context, Argentina was just beginning a democratic phase, and in 1916 Hipólito Yrigoyen was elected president by universal suffrage (SILVA, 2007). However, only men voted. That government was considered more open, with different civil movements exposing their problems, to which the government tried to guarantee freedoms. The world context was marked by wars, revolutions and a hard period by the end of World War I. Mexico had had the Mexican Revolution in 1910 and Russia had the Russian Revolution of 1917. There was a strong anti-imperialist sentiment in the middle classes, and the youth expressed some of these ideals.

The labor movement was incipient and did not constitute a strong political actor. The middle class developed more quickly bringing different demands, particularly about higher education. It was the students, with their political movements, who played a more prominent role in social and political demands. Since the end of the 19th century, students had acquired significant weight as an active part of youth, as regards political issues (RAMIREZ, 2002).

In 1917, students made a petition addressed to the Ministry of Public Instruction demanding a democratization of the university and freedom of the Chairs system. Alongside claims of autonomy and freedom for universities, students began discussions about the role of political responsibility to the nation and to the defense of democracy. The desire for a new social and political situation for Argentina and, in extension, for the Latin American nations was growing stronger.

This new vision fostered the sense of an active university, both in the production and dissemination of knowledge, in the implementation of solidarity policies, in the maintenance of peace, in the elimination of frontiers between Latin peoples and in the development of an "awareness of Latin American communities" (MONCAYIO, 2008).

## The Educational Context

As described above, the University of Cordoba was run by a Catholic oligarchy and the students did not participate in any administrative activity, even in the elections of rector. They have long been calling for changes in the students' relationship with university administration. On June 15, 1918, there were elections for rector, following the same system, that is, only professors' votes. Antonio Nores, a Jesuit candidate, was elected and he was

considered conservative by them. The students protested and, among the protest activities, they occupied the rectory. According to Bernheim (1998), the students decreed an indefinite strike with great violence, mobilizations in the streets and confrontation with police, but they had the support of unions, politicians, intellectuals and other students.

The intensity of the acts culminated in the resignation of the rector-elect. The President Hipólito Yrigoyen, who had the students as part of his social base, appoints the Minister of Justice Mr. José Salinas as a rector. According to Portantiero (1968), Salinas paid attention to student demands, accepted the resignation of conservative professors, constituted a new management with members linked to the student movement and guaranteed aspects of university reform. This gave life to the movement.

Although the trigger for the Córdoba movement had been the election of rector, it must be considered that the changes claimed long time ago were not only educational, but also political and social.

Among the educational demands were more than a student participation in university management, they asked: change and establishment of free chairs, a project of university autonomy, that is, autonomy of management and didactics and freedom for students and people outside the university to attend classes. The lifelong chair, dogmatic and bookish teaching was criticized as outdated and distant from social reality. The pedagogical practices followed the traditional style - classes dictated by the teachers and repetition of the offered courses (BERNHEIM, 1998). To meet the students demands, changes were required in the University Statutes. The Rector José Salinas changes the Statutes and until 1921, the Statutes of all the Argentine universities were changed.

## The Current Events of the Córdoba Movement

Because the students demands are still very important and have been the basis for many other Latin American, such as the student movement of 1968 in Brazil (PEREIRA, 2008), we analyze them a little more.

The first stage of this claim came at the end of 1917, through a petition addressed to the Ministry of Public Instruction, demanding a democratization and change on teaching system. They wanted to change the archaic structure of the university and pointed out that some universities outside Córdoba were already centers of discussion about modern scientific issues and political and social issues. The students through the Cordoba Manifest asked changes, as it can see in this excerpt from the document:

Our university regime - even the most recent one - is anachronistic. It is founded on a kind of divine right; the divine right of university professors. It creates itself. In him it is born and in him it dies, maintaining itself in an Olympic distance. The University Federation of Córdoba stands up to fight against this regime (...). It claims a strictly democratic government and maintains that, in the university community, sovereignty, the right to self-government lies mainly with students. The concept about authority that corresponds and accompanies a teacher in a home of students cannot rely on the

strength of disciplines extraneous to the very substance of the studies. Authority, in a student home, does not exercise by commanding, but suggesting and loving: teaching. (free translation).

As for academic freedom, the reading of the Manifest makes it clear that students wanted the multiplicity of ideas, defended the possibility of teaching different currents of thought and ideological tendencies and the liberty for expressing philosophical, scientific, social and political ideas without repressions. The defense of this point was for the freedom to teach and to learn according to the interest of teacher and student (PEREIRA, 2008).

As already seen, another central point of the demands was the emphasis on a more democratic, more participatory process and, in this sense, several issues were pointed out, such as: student participation in university governance; joint elections; co-management government; expansion of university access; social assistance to needy students; gratuity; struggle against dictatorship and imperialism. These are important aspects still today and their conquest is not always present in educational systems of higher education in many Latin American countries. In Brazil, no university has parity elections, particularly, public ones. There is no government with co-management. We have recently had policies that have extended access to university and social welfare policies to needy students.

Another claim that the movement brought was the need for the university to be more close in seeking solutions to social issues, to societal problems (this was an incipient way of understanding the function of extension), and linking the university to systems basic education, dialoguing with previous levels of education and assisting in the training process. This claim is of great importance and is increasingly present in the purposes of the contemporary university.

Above all, the Manifest called for a Latin American unity, hoping that other Latin students would broaden their struggle to defend the South American university and to build an educational pillar of Latin American integration. Thus, the last paragraph of the Manifest is expressed, "The university youth of Cordoba, through its federation, greets the comrades of all America and encourages them to collaborate in the work of liberty that begins." In a way, this claim had an answer in the proposition of the Federal University of Latin American Integration.

The Federal University of Latin American Integration - Unila, is a university that in many points, brings the spirit of the Córdoba movement. Its institutional project clearly shows that Unila is born linked to the purposes of the Cordoba Reform, as it reads on its website:

Unila is committed to the destiny of Latin American societies, whose roots are referenced in the heritage of the University Reform of Cordoba (1918), but with a future perspective aimed at building sustainable societies in the XXI century, based on the Latin American identity, in its cultural diversity and oriented towards economic development, social justice and environmental sustainability.

In its institutional project it presents as its vocation:

to be a university that contributes to Latin American integration, with an emphasis on Mercosur, through humanistic, scientific and technological knowledge, and



cooperation in solidarity between higher education institutions, governmental and international organizations.

Unila presents an expanded concept of Latin American integration that includes "all the countries of the American continent that speak Spanish, Portuguese or French, as well as other languages derived from Latin." With this expanded concept the integration involves all the countries of South America, the countries of Central America like Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic and the Mexico of North America.

## The Legacy Of Reform

The legacy of the Reform of Cordoba has been of being a base that feeds new looks to the university demands in all the hundred years of its existence. Its claims, its achievements, and above all, the awareness of the democratic struggles inside and outside Latin American universities, are essential aspects of an inclusive university, are compasses to indicate directions of missions that are still necessary, despite of ten decades have been gone.

The absence of some achievements has guaranteed the permanence of the Reformation claims in the struggles of Latin American students. The students have been attentive in their demands to the university policies for a more democratization and deepening of characteristics of a Latin American university.

The defense of university autonomy and an ever deeper process of democratization, diversity and multiculturalism are principles that unify students from Latin American countries and are increasingly part of the students movements in this century.

The social insertion of the university and its view of its problems have altered practices and avoided its closure in itself, whether in teaching practice, research, production and especially in the purposes of extension.

After a century, students still find that many of the demands brought by the Cordoba movement, despite all scientific, cultural, educational and technological development, are proposed for which it is worth fighting and making achievements in Latin American universities.

## Final Considerations

The Córdoba movement focused at some problems that structuralized the university and were maintained since three centuries ago, despite the various changes that occurred during that time.

Basically, the problems were about the administrative regime of the university, which was closed and arbitrary; the teaching method; the concept of authority; the non-autonomy prevailing at the University of Cordoba in the early twentieth century. The bases of the

movement's claims were: co-government among administrators, teachers and students; university financial autonomy; revocation of the teaching faculty for life; freedom of education and more modern disciplines; most up-to-date method of teaching; public contract for teaching; deeper commitment to society; action in social problems.

The Córdoba movement contributed over the years to Latin American students to keep in mind the directions it brought. These guidelines are contemporary and inspire the feeling that there is still much to be changed. In addition, the university of the 21st century has its new guidelines regarding to its historical, cultural, political, and social time.

In addition to the constant appeal of the Córdoba movement, it is important that in the aspect of Latin American integration of this century, other spaces for interculturality be created. There is an understanding that Latin America is a unit that goes beyond the political issue and encompasses cultural and educational integration.

In the phenomenon of internationalization in the 21st century, student mobility provokes a rediscovery of neighboring countries and a Latin American feeling about its culture, values and customs. The Córdoba movement remains in the 21st century not as a model, but as an inspiration.

Today the city of Cordoba is considered Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, and teaching at the University of Cordoba is free, has no fee and secular, what we may say it result from the Córdoba Movement.

## References

BERNHEIM, C. T. La Reforma Universitaria De Córdoba. **Educación Superior y Sociedad**, Caracas: UNESCO, v. 9, n 1, p. 103-127, 1998.

BIAGINI, Hugo. **La reforma universitaria**: Antecedentes y consecuencias. Buenos Aires: Leviatán, 2000.

BONAVENA, Pablo Augusto; CALIFA, Juan Sebastián; MILLÁN, Mariano. **El movimiento estudiantil argentino**: historias con presente. Buenos Aires: Cooperativas, 2007.

BORCHES, C. A 90 años de la reforma universitaria: Córdoba se redime. **La Ménsula**, ano 2, n. 5, 2008. Disponível em: [http://www.reformadel18.unc.edu.ar/privates/La\\_mensula%5B5%5D.pdf](http://www.reformadel18.unc.edu.ar/privates/La_mensula%5B5%5D.pdf). Acesso em: 24 out. 2018.

CLARK, R.B. **The encyclopedia of higher education**. New York: Oxford; Seoul, Toquio: Pergamon Press, 1992.

MANIFESTO DE CÓRDOBA. La Juventud Argentina de Córdoba a los hombres libres de Sudamérica (Manifiesto del 21 de junio de 1918). Disponível em: MONCAYO, V. M. Permanencia, continuidad y cambio del movimiento universitario: reflexiones a propósito de la Reforma de Córdoba. In: SADER, E.; GENTILI, P.; ABOITES, H. **La Reforma universitaria desafíos y perspectivas noventa años después**. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2008.

PEREIRA, E.M.A . Universidade no contexto da América Latina: 90 anos da Reforma de Córdoba e 40 anos da Reforma Universitária Brasileira. **Revista Políticas Educativas**, Campinas, v.2, n. 1, p.54-75, dez. 2008.

PORTANTIERO, J. C. **Estudiantes y política em América Latina**: el proceso de la reforma universitaria (1918-1939). México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1968.

RAMÍREZ, Hernán. **La Universidad de Córdoba**: socialización y reproducción de la elite en el período colonial y principios del independiente. Córdoba: Ferreyra Editor, 2002.

ROMO, A. D. e MÜHLENBROCK, R. C. La dimension social do movimento estudantil de Córdoba de 1918. **Izquierdas**, v. 33, p. 42 -65, mayo 2017.

ROSSATO, R. **Universidade**: nove séculos de história. Passo Fundo: EdiUPF, 1998.

SILVA, Leopoldo Nogueira. O Manifesto da F. U. de Córdoba de 1918: retomando o sonho do movimento estudantil para impulsionar uma revolução universitária na América Latina. *In*: COLÓQUIO INTERNACIONAL SOBRE GESTION UNIVERSITARIA EM AMERICA DEL SUR, 7., 2007, Mar del Plata, Argentina. **Trabalhos do...** Mar del Plata: [s.n.], 2007.

TCACH, César. Movimiento estudiantil e intelectualidad reformista en Argentina. (1918-1946) **Cuadernos de Historia**, n. 37, 2012.

UNILA - Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana. Vocaçao da Unila. Disponível em: <https://www.unila.edu.br/conteudo/voca%C3%A7%C3%A3o-da-unila>. Acesso em: 31 out. 2018.