

Identification and Evaluation of Sources

This investigation seeks to analyze the ways in which Eva Perón, the First Lady of Argentina (1946 -1952), became involved in the country's women's rights movement. Thus, this brings forth the question: To what extent did Eva Perón contribute to women's rights in Argentina during the 1940's and early 1950's? Various sources such as books, speeches, and websites were reviewed to obtain a variety of perspectives on the topic, including materials written in Spanish. These references document Perón's rise to power as well as her stance on achieving women's rights in Argentina. Knowledge gained from these sources will be utilized to provide an accurate examination of her role within Argentina's women's rights movement.

The first source, "Evita and Women's Participation in Politics," recounts the Presidency of Juan Perón and the beginnings of the women's suffrage movement in which both Peron's advocated. The source is an article for Evita Perón's official website; therefore, it is mainly utilized to praise and remember Evita's legacy. However, its value lies within the historical facts provided, and it consists of important dates that led to the enactment of women's right to vote. It was written by Professor Pablo Vázquez, a historian who is also the Director of the Evita Museum¹. His position indicates that he has experience in the field of history and a breadth of knowledge surrounding Evita's life. On the other hand, the limitations of the source relates to its purpose. As the main website of Evita Perón, Vázquez was obligated to write a piece that would showcase Evita's achievements and highlight the positive aspects of her career. He constantly refers to Evita's active participation in politics, breaking gender roles, and defends that she was not involved solely for her husband's political gain. This may skew his interpretation of Evita's

¹ "Distinguen Al Miembro De Nuestro Instituto, Pablo Vázquez, En La Cámara De Senadores De La Nación." Instituto Nacional Manuel Dorrego. December 5, 2014. Accessed August 20, 2016. <http://www.institucionacionalmanueldorrego.com/index.php/notas/item/2631-distinguen-al-miembro-de-nuestro-instituto-pablo-vazquez-en-la-camara-de-senadores-de-la-nacion>.

actions and affect the reliability of the source. However, the source was especially helpful in tracing Evita Perón's political activity and her methods to achieving women's suffrage.

The next source is a book called *¡Feminismo!: The Woman's Movement in Argentina* by Marifran Carlson who received a doctorate in Latin American Studies. The book describes important leaders who have spearheaded the women's movement in Argentina and presents chronological information to the distinct eras of the women's movement from colonial times to the presidency of Perón. The value of the source lends to its ability to summarize past events and also offer a different side to Evita which criticized the works of feminists. The limitations of this book include that it is not a first-hand account of the event, so it is difficult to truly understand the opinions surrounding that time. Furthermore as an informational text, it does not supply a thorough review of the topic and only provides a superficial summary. On the other hand, it provides an alternate perspective to the first source which is essential to gain a balance overview and fully understand Evita Perón's role in achieving women's rights.

Investigation

In order to assess the scope of Eva Perón's influence on women's rights in Argentina, it is necessary to reflect on her path into politics and the work she had done during her husband's time of presidency up until her death in 1952.² Aspiring to be an actress, she left home at the age of fifteen and met her future husband Juan Perón in January 1944.³ At the time, Juan Perón was Argentina's Secretary of Labor when a massive earthquake shook the city of San Juan, causing him to create a fundraiser to provide relief for the damaged city; Eva also helped collect

² Frederick C. Turner and José Enrique Miguens, *Juan Perón and the Reshaping of Argentina* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 15.

³ *Ibid.*, 16.

donations, and their relationship was spawned from this connection.⁴ During her husband's presidential campaign and after he was inaugurated, Eva broke gender roles and accompanied her husband to meetings and rallies and voiced support for her husband's plans. She refused to stay within the norms of first ladies and was outspoken about her desire to actively be involved in politics.⁵

The working class men and women rallied behind Eva due in part to how relatable Eva was, especially for women of the lower class. She herself was an illegitimate child and had struggled to obtain a job after leaving at fifteen.⁶ She, however, was not the first woman to address the issue of women's rights in Argentina. Alicia Moreau and the Argentine Beneficent Society both supported educational rights for women to gain equality.⁷ The Beneficent Society consisted of mostly elite women and did not stray too far from women's traditional roles which made them unappealing to lower class women. Therefore, Eva's platform was more relevant and inclusive of all women, and her leadership within her husband's presidency gave women the confidence to fight for their rights. By October 1946, she made significant contributions to her husband's Five Year Plan to include a proposal for women's voting rights and states "'The transformation of the concept of what it means to be a woman demands it because women have made more and more sacrifices in order to meet their obligations without asking for even minimum of rights'"⁸. She justifies that women have worked hard all of their lives submissive

⁴ "The Day Which Split History: October 17, 1945." Evita Perón Historical Research. April 1997. Accessed September 25, 2016. <http://www.evita-peron.org/part2.htm>.

⁵ Frederick C. Turner and José Enrique Miguens, *Juan Perón and the Reshaping of Argentina* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 19.

⁶ Turner and Miguens, *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷ Mercer, Marilyn. "Feminism in Argentina." Center for Digital Discourse and Culture. 1998. Accessed September 25, 2016. <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/feminism/arg.html>.

⁸ Vázquez, Pablo A. "Evita and Women's Participation in Politics." Evita Perón Historical Research. July 2007. Accessed September 25, 2016. http://www.evita-peron.org/evita_peron_instituto.htm.

under men without asking for the smallest of rights, but as times change, women are gradually becoming more involved in public affairs, and the meaning of being a woman is no longer simply restricted to domestic work.

Ultimately, Eva's goal of women suffrage was successful with the establishment of Law 13.010 granting women's right to vote on September 23, 1947.⁹ In a speech to Argentinean women, Eva reminded the people "I vibrate with you, because my fight is also the fight of the heart of women who are in times of oppression...Defending in summary, all that a woman has the duty of defending: her blood, her bread, her limits, her dreams...I also know you, the remote in distance, but not in sentiment, the women of our farms and villages...You also have your part and deserve to defend it"¹⁰. She utilizes very personal pronouns in order to create a connection between her and the audience. She echoes that she is just like every other Argentinean woman who has faced discrimination in a male-dominated society, and she acknowledges women in different social classes, such as those in the agricultural regions, to appeal to the common woman.

On the contrary, there are those who believe that her support for women's rights was solely motivated by the overwhelming support her husband would have during that election year if she could sway the women to vote for him. She wanted to make him appealing to all voters, and a key group was the women. She achieved this by portraying "herself as a compassionate champion of an underclass element of society while, at the same time, creating a block of new

⁹ Vázquez, Pablo A. "Evita and Women's Participation in Politics." Evita Perón Historical Research. July 2007. Accessed September 25, 2016. http://www.evita-peron.org/evita_peron_instituto.htm.

¹⁰ *Partido Kolina Distrito Sgo. Del Estero*. 1st ed. 2013. Web. 27 Sept. 2016. <http://www.pjn.gov.ar/cne/secelec/document/balances/7089-1395-22-Kolina.pdf>. "Vibré contigo, porque mi lucha, es también la lucha del corazón de la mujer que en los momentos de apremio...Defendiendo en resumen, todo aquello que la mujer tiene el deber de defender: su sangre, su pan, su techo, sus sueños... Te conozco también a ti, la alejada en distancia, pero no en sentimiento, la mujer de nuestras chacras y pueblos... Tú también tienes tu parte, y mereces defenderla"

voters who would be uniquely loyal to her husband”¹¹. She led the Argentinean women to put their faith in the presidency of the Perón’s, and with this clever maneuver, she gained thousands of supporters. She founded the Partido Peronista Femenino, the women’s section of the Peronist party, on July 26, 1949 which resulted in over sixty percent voting for her husband and led to the election of many women into political offices in the next couple of years.¹² Although she did make significant strides for women’s political rights, she did not consider herself a feminist. She despised the feminists and accused them of wanting to be men; in her novel *La Razon de Mi Vida*, she argued that “they [feminists] seemed to be dominated by the spite of not being born men, rather than proud to be women” and discussed how her husband enlightened her that the feminist movement would achieve nothing because they were only striving to be like men.¹³ It is paradoxical for Eva to advocate that women deserved to form their own opinions and carry out their own decisions, yet she stated that “For a woman to be a Peronist...is before anything to be loyal to Perón [Juan], subordinate to Perón, and to have blind confidence in Perón.”¹⁴ Her words contradict one another as she implies that the women’s movement requires loyalty to a man in order to thrive. Moreover, her influence on women’s rights did not seem to go beyond voting rights. She worked closely with labor unions to create a safe workplace for women and improve conditions, but once again, she encouraged those women to be active in politics. Her work ultimately revolved around getting Argentinean women the right to vote which may also

¹¹ Scarpa, Anna. "Uncovering the Megalomania Behind Evita Perón." New York University. December 2000. Accessed September 26, 2016. <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/keefe/ww1/scarpa.html>.

¹² Lynn Walter, *Women's Rights: A Global View* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 7-8.

¹³ Perón, Eva. *La Razón de Mi Vida*. Buenos Aires, 1952.

¹⁴ Carlson, Marifran. *Feminismo!: The Woman's Movement in Argentina from Its Beginnings to Eva Perón*. (Chicago, Illinois: Academy Chicago, 1988), 195. Carlson, Marifran. *Feminismo!: The Woman's Movement in Argentina from Its Beginnings to Eva Perón*. Chicago, Illinois: Academy Chicago, 1988.

reinforce the idea that she focused on women's rights to ensure her husband's ascendance to the presidency.

From the analysis of various sources, the conclusion drawn from this investigation is that Eva Perón contributed to a great extent in women's political rights, but it did not seem as though she focused beyond women's suffrage. She certainly was not the first woman in Argentina to lead a women's rights movement, but she created the women's wing of the Peronist Party called the Partido Peronista Femenino, and this organization enabled many women to have the courage to enter the realm of politics and even rise to higher roles in the government. Eva was also a very controversial figure in that she asserted her desire to improve women's rights; however, she may very well be influenced by her husband or manipulating the public to help her husband win the election. Therefore, it can be concluded that Eva significantly assisted women's entrance into politics, but nonetheless, her reasons for doing so remain unclear.

Evaluation

During this investigation, many methods were employed to obtain both primary and secondary sources to answer the research question. It was difficult to obtain primary sources because the databases that I knew of only consisted of U.S. documents. I also continuously tried to find copies of newspapers from Argentina during Peron's presidency but to no avail. However, I discovered a manuscript of Eva Peron's speech to women, and it contributed greatly to understanding her ideology. Additionally, the manuscript was written in Spanish, and fortunately, I can read and write Spanish which significantly expanded my selection of sources. Websites that I utilized were also written in Spanish, and to confirm my translations, I utilized a Spanish to English translator. Historians in the past did not have access to these modern devices, and due to our society being more globalized, people are more aware of other languages and

cultures and can share information. Therefore, words can be defined with more accuracy. Before, translations were extremely rough, or historians would not even consider using a source outside of their language.

The investigation also showcased how subjective history can be; therefore, certain types of information must be taken with a grain of salt. For example, Eva Peron's official website was one of my main sources, and the whole passage appeared to highlight Peron's achievements and her positive contributions to Argentina. It definitely presented a one-sided analysis of Peron's life which is understandable as the main purpose of the website is to pay homage to Peron and remember her legacy. Different opinions and perspectives demonstrate a challenge for historians to create an agreeable standard for determining which story or piece of information is right or true. This challenge is usually not very common in the world of math where no matter which approach is chosen, the same answer can be achieved. Additionally, recent historians may have hindsight bias when assessing events of the past. For instance with hindsight, some historians claim that Eva Peron manipulated the media and gained the support of oppressed groups just to benefit her husband's presidential campaign. The common people back then did not make this connection, and thus, this uncertainty makes it harder for current historians to determine the decision-making process of people in the past.

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