

Matthew Karush. *The New Cultural History of Peronism: Power and Identity in Mid-Twentieth-Century Argentina*. Durham/London- Duke University Press, 2010. Pp. vi + 309; ISBN 978-0-8223-4738-5

Unlike other books about Peron and his policies, this work attempts to capture the essence of the politics from a “ground-up” cultural perspective through multiple topic specific essays that discuss the relationship between the implementation of Peron’s ideology and the masses of Argentines. While some of the references to outside regimes (mainly Axis power ideology) and those regarding the geography of Argentina require outside knowledge to understand, the essays are largely self contained and thoroughly informative.

In the opening chapter Matthew Karush draws connections between the melodramatic mass culture of radio stations and movie screens of the 1930’s and the political appeals of Juan Peron between 1943-46. Karush paints a picture of a mass media that portrays any form of wealth as a trait of the malicious and poverty as that of the dignified and proud, the tango as the dance of the authentic Argentine and the fox trot as that of the elitist sell outs, and so forth and so on, with similar comparisons that appealed to the emotions of the masses concerning what constituted a genuine Argentine and how they should act. Upon his ascent to power, Peron not only continued these types of portrayals through government mandate and censorship, he adopted this language of morally charged juxtaposition when speaking to his constituents. He often spoke of the poor as the moral teachers of the rich and frequently put the latter down for their selfishness. This political rhetoric, in combination with social interventions by Peron’s government, allowed his working class constituents to feel like the genuine, morally superior class of Argentines, while still ascending to greater economic comfort in the absence of selfishness. In this essay, Karush does an excellent job of providing a plethora of specific examples to support his generalizations about Argentina’s media outlets during this period and neatly ties in Peron’s logic and manipulation without becoming psychoanalytical.

Peron’s political tactics are further explored by Natalia Milanesio in her discussion on how Peron took his opponent’s prejudicial stereotypes and used them to bolster the strength of his own camp. Milanesio asserts that the “whiter” middle and upper class anti-Peronists resorted to racial slurs against their “darker” lower class counterparts for several reasons. In addition to a general frustration about what they considered to be a barbaric invasion of their cities by the *cabecitas negras*, one ultimate reason was to covertly speak out against Peron. His government pledged a commitment to protect the unprivileged and working class and persecuted any form of criticism directed at its ideals. Thus, attacking a non-political but common trait of Peron’s followers seemed like one of only a few safe cards to play. Recognizing yet another cultural opportunity to assimilate into his political platform, however, Peron took his opponent’s common terms of insult, such as *grasa* (greaser), and began to use the terms affectionately toward his followers. Simultaneously, he instructed the media to portray the upper classes as bitter and spiteful. Anti-Peronists argued that this affirmation encouraged even more socially unacceptable and delinquent behavior by the lower classes. Milanesio clearly sheds light on the blatant prejudices against members of the working class in Peron’s Argentina, but equally gives voice to the legitimate grievances

expressed by the upper and middle class with regards to a degradation in the quality of their day to day lives.

In Diana Lenton's contribution to this collection, we are presented with evidence regarding the lack of influence Argentina's indigenous populations had in affecting change within Peron's administration, despite valiant efforts. These efforts included an indigenous, horseback march to the capital from their home territories to ask for changes in policy, which resulted in Peron's officials violently shipping them back to their homes. One of the reasons cited for this reaction included the indigenous people's reaffirmation of their separate identity from the rest of Argentina's population and by extension holding a position of dissonance with the official Peronist policy of national unity. This information elucidates the political philosophy of Peron by demonstrating that he was not only against the rich and for the poor. If one supported his policies, he supported them, and he likewise cut those who crossed him off at the knees, regardless of societal or financial circumstances. Those factors seemed to contribute more to the severity or generosity of the policies enacted, dependent on whose side they fell. Lenton goes on to discuss various acts of federal recognition and the enactment of benevolent policies that were either specifically for or benefited Argentina's indigenous population, but she is resolute in asserting that the actions were executed ultimately for the benefit of the Peronist agenda in Argentina and not seriously impacted by the calls for change from the indigenous.

Chamosa's essay is informative on one of the few areas on which Peron and his enemies could both agree to support: the advancement of awareness regarding the cultural and historical importance of the Criollo. He proceeds to elaborate on the specifics, but ultimately concludes that both sides agreed most of the time in their backing. The subject tide is then turned to female specific essays. The first one relays information on the architecture associated specifically with Eva Peron, and the latter addresses the annual Peronist celebration of the working class beauty queens and their importance to the morale of the movement while recounting the personal stories of individual "queens." The penultimate study provides another look at the Peronist intervention within the public sphere through commentary on the connections between populist politics and mass consumption, and the final study uses the paradigm of 1950's Argentina to explain the role of emotions in fostering of political struggle and resistance.

For someone who knows little about the subject matter, this book may require some outside research to fully grasp the assertions made and references alluded to. Once that research is accomplished, however, this book lends itself well to providing an Anglophone with a seemingly comprehensive overview of how industry, society, bureaucracy, and individuals all interacted and functioned culturally with one another within the context of Juan Peron's Argentina. This collection of interdisciplinary essays is at its least a wealth of intellectual information made accessible to the curious, everyday individual and at most an invaluable resource to those executing Argentine specific research or scholarship.

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