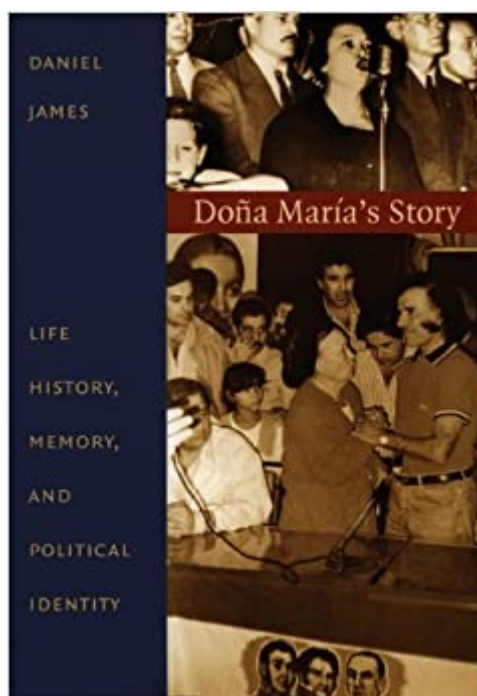


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Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, And Political Identity (Latin America Otherwise)



Synopsis

In this remarkable book historian Daniel James presents the gripping, poignant life-story of Doña María Roldán, a woman who lived and worked for six decades in the meatpacking community of Berisso, Argentina. A union activist and fervent supporter of Juan and Eva Perón, Doña María's evocative testimony prompts James to analyze the promise and problematic nature of using oral sources for historical research. The book thus becomes both fascinating narrative and methodological inquiry. Doña María's testimony is grounded in both the local context (based on the author's thirteen years of historical and ethnographic research in Berisso) and a broader national narrative. In this way, it differs from the dominant genre of women's testimonial literature, and much recent ethnographic work in Latin America, which have often neglected historical and communal contextualization in order to celebrate individual agency and self-construction. James examines in particular the ways that gender influences Doña María's representation of her story. He is careful to acknowledge that oral history challenges the historian to sort through complicated sets of motivations and desires—the historian's own wish to uncover the truth of an informant's life and the interviewee's hope to make sense of her or his past and encode it with myths of the self. This work is thus James's effort to present his research and his relationship with Doña María with both theoretical sophistication and recognition of their mutual affection. While written by a historian, Doña María's Story also engages with concerns drawn from such disciplines as anthropology, cultural studies, and literary criticism. It will be especially appreciated by those involved in oral, Latin American, and working-class history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Doña María's Story brings to life a forgotten heroine of the struggle for justice in Latin America and questions how we can listen to her voice. "Ariel Dorfman" This book is a gem, a gift to the reader, a wonderful read. We learn about a significant part of Argentina's sad modern history at the same time that we are reading a highly sophisticated and well-informed meditation on the oral historian's craft. "Deborah Levenson, Boston College" James attempts to find meaning in the process of exploring another person's life: "How was intellectual closure concerning this incomplete project possible?" His questions and answers will resonate with oral historians, folklorists, and biographers. All levels. (S. S. Arpad Choice) "An exceptional book, a joy to read . . . The secret to its success is the writing. The author skillfully draws you into his subject, making you eager to know more about Doña María, entangling you in the web of Peronist political intrigue and the Argentine labor movement, presenting you with a wealth of information, then questioning the very means by which the data has been gathered and reproduced . . . [A] powerfully emotive engagement . . . To sum up, the message of this book brings to mind one word: respect. Respect for a woman of such fortitude and faith; and respect for a historian of such ability, sensitivity, and insight." (Catherine Davies Biography) "Powerful. . . . [This] testimon[y] helps us reconstruct women's working-class history in ways that are unachievable using traditional historical sources. . . . [T]he most important thing that [this] text [does] is insert women as historical agents, submissive to and defiant of economic inequality, traditional gender roles, and racial prejudice." (Susan E. Mannon International Labor and Working-Class History) "Daniel James has written a wonderful one source history work. . . . James engages in a dense and innovative way with some of the most challenging theoretical and methodological issues currently faced by historians in their craft." (Alexandre Fortes Labor History) "Historians frustrated by what has been written for and against I, Rigoberta Menchú should rush to read this book. . . . One would think that historians would consider it de rigueur to twin testimony with analytical commentary, especially after the Menchú furor, but James is one of the first to do so, and he does it exceedingly well. . . . [R]iveting. . . . [A] highly readable life history that combines politics, personal triumphs and tragedies, and humor. . . . [I]nsightful. . . . [O]utstanding. . . . James's personal reflections and his politics add to the book's considerable merits. . . . [A] refreshing departure from most history books. . . . [P]owerful.

. . . This important book makes original contributions to oral history, Latin American history, labor history, women's studies, and cultural studies. It will be widely read and discussed for a long time, I am sure." (Elizabeth Dore American Historical Review)"Roldán's life history is important, given her prominent role in the founding of the meatpackers union in Berisso, and the intersections between this local struggle, burgeoning labor activism in the political sphere, and the emergence of a national populist movement with Juan Perón at its head. She provides an insider account of these struggles, a lived experience that traditional archival sources could never convey with the same immediacy. . . . Doña María's story is compelling in its own right, a narrative she conveys through exceptional speaking skills and a keen analytical sense." (Gerard Huiskamp South Eastern Latin Americanist)

"This book is a gem, a gift to the reader, a wonderful read. We learn about a significant part of Argentina's sad modern history at the same time that we are reading a highly sophisticated and well-informed meditation on the oral historian's craft."-- Deborah Levenson, Boston College

The book was brand new so there were no issues with condition and it arrived exactly on time. I had to purchase this book for a class. In the context of the class, it was an informative book but not one that I would have read if it weren't for the class.

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