

Hernando de Soto Polar: Standing up for the Poor

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My topic of interest, Hernando de Soto Polar and his crusade for property rights for the poor, came about as a result of exposure to a journal article that caught my eye. My screening criteria for finding a topic had begun with identifying persons who took a stand and made a difference. Among the many historical figures that are so well known, an obscure economist in his native Peru attracted my attention. The fact that he was relatively unknown was what intrigued me. It was fascinating that this unheard of Latin American figure had made a big difference by the ripple effects of his thinking that were still being felt worldwide.

I immersed myself into research by viewing numerous documentaries about Hernando de Soto and the effects of globalization. That research expanded by reading his autobiography, *The Other Path*, which gives De Soto's refreshing perspective on providing a nonviolent and constructive alternative for Peru's hardworking poor. Previously they only had the choice of continuing on with little hope of advancement, or turning to the Shining Path, an extreme Maoist insurgency. De Soto described in his book the economic solutions that would turn people away from a dark support of violent terrorism, and towards a bright future of building individual prosperity through free markets. The initial research was broadened by internet searches that revealed other primary sources such as contemporary, primary-source newspaper and magazine articles, the Milton Friedman award citation from the Cato Institute, de Soto's speeches, and interviews with de Soto's graduate assistant who studied historical class conflict in Peru.

In consideration of the many ways of telling the story of Hernando de Soto, I thought that the typical approach would result in a two dimensional exploration of the subject such as a documentary, exhibit or showcase. The more I looked into Hernando de Soto and his legacy, the

more it seemed like peeling back the many layers of an onion. The depth needed to explore the data lent itself best to the complexities that could be addressed by using a website.

In the 1980's, Hernando de Soto Polar stood up for the poor to take them on an important step into the mainstream economy by advocating legal reforms in his native Peru. He faced strong opposition from the country's anti-capitalist guerilla force, the Shining Path, who tried to assassinate de Soto three times because they needed to keep the farmers feeling blocked from being successful. He lobbied politicians and elites to change the laws to include the poor by recognising the poor's property rights and making it easier to start businesses legally. After accepting de Soto's ideas, the Peruvian government changed the system to help the poor become legally recognised through a legal identity, and have access to business and property institutions which would allow them to participate in the global economy. In the end, his plans became sought after by presidents who asked him to repeat his significant success in other countries.