
BACKGROUND BOOKS

BRAZIL

In 1494, Pope Alexander VI was asked by the kings of Spain and Portugal, the world's greatest seafaring powers, to establish a basis for future territorial claims in the Atlantic.

The pope drew an imaginary line running from pole to pole, 270 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands, and gave Portugal all lands discovered east of that line (including, unbeknownst to anyone at the time, 1,200 miles of South American coastline). Spain got the rest.

Not until 1500, when Admiral Pedro Álvares Cabral chanced upon it on his way to India, did the Portuguese learn that the land now called Brazil actually existed. Another three decades elapsed before they began to exploit the colony systematically. In 1532, the first town was established at São Vicente. Cattle and sugar cane were introduced, and a sugar mill was built.

By the 1570s, when Pero de Magalhães de Gandavo toured Brazil's sugar-producing provinces, he counted some 60 mills and estimated the colony's sugar exports at one million pounds a year. His detailed chronicle is translated as **The Histories of Brazil** (1922; Longwood, 1978). By 1627, exports of sugar exceeded 32 million pounds, the colony's first bonanza.

Sugar was not the only product of Brazilian farms. Tobacco from Salvador, laced with molasses, was a prized commodity, and from the cattle-ranching interior came hides for export and salted beef for local consumption.

The burgeoning trade between Brazil and the mother country was paralleled by an influx of slaves to work the plantations. Between 1575

and 1650, Portuguese slavers shipped more than 300,000 Africans from Angola to Brazil. Herbert Klein relates the story of the slave trade in **The Middle Passage** (Princeton, 1978, cloth & paper) while Celso Furtado's **The Economic Growth of Brazil** (Univ. of Calif., 1963) surveys the colony's agricultural and commercial expansion.

By the 1680s, competition from Spain's Caribbean possessions had ended Brazil's long reign as the hemisphere's sugar king. But discovery of gold in the province of Minas Gerais rescued Brazil's sagging economy. Gold shipments to Portugal rose from 514 kilos in 1699 to 14,500 kilos in 1712.

Charles Boxer's **The Golden Age of Brazil** (Univ. of Calif., 1962, cloth & paper) is a spirited account of the period from a historian who knows how to spin a good tale.

Gold lured thousands of Brazilians into the continent's interior. The selections edited by Richard Morse in **The Bandeirantes: The Historical Role of the Brazilian Pathfinders** (Knopf, 1965) capture the trailblazing spirit. From São Paulo, the daring *bandeirantes* in their fragile canoes followed the Paraná River deep into the backlands (the *sertão*). From Belém, adventurers traced the Amazon and its tributaries all the way to Mato Grosso. In essence, Brazil reached its present boundaries by 1750.

The *sertão* has always held a fascination for Brazilians—much as the Old West has for Americans. It is depicted by novelist João Guimarães Rosa in **The Devil to Pay in the Backlands** (Knopf, 1963) as a mag-

ical land of renewal and discovery.

But it was also a region where laws did not rule, where outlaws sometimes became folk heroes. Billy Chandler brings to life the notorious Lampião in **The Bandit King** (Texas A&M, 1978). Lampião's story is still told on Brazilian television—in soap opera form.

Race relations in colonial Brazil diverged sharply from the pattern in the American South. During the turbulent gold rush era, Brazilians of diverse races and social backgrounds mixed indiscriminately, and slaves purchased their freedom with surprising frequency. As mechanics, artisans, shopkeepers, and small farmers, they were indispensable to the colony's economy.

Tolerance did not make slavery less harsh, but it did create more flexible racial attitudes, and Brazilians today perceive race in very different terms than do Americans. As Gilberto Freyre wrote in his classic **The Masters and the Slaves** (1933; Knopf, 1964), "Every Brazilian carries in his soul the birthmark of the African."

Other worthwhile works on race in Brazil include **Neither Slave Nor Free** (Johns Hopkins, 1972, paper only), a collection of essays on the colonial period edited by David Cohen and Jack Greene; Roger Bastide's **The African Religions of Brazil** (Johns Hopkins, 1978, cloth & paper); and Jorge Amado's novel **Tent of Miracles** (Knopf, 1971, cloth; Avon, 1978, paper), set in the city of Salvador, where Afro-Brazilian culture displays a special vitality in its artistry and dance, its *carnaval* and *candomblé* (folk religion).

By 1800, Brazil's "golden age" was over—the mines, it was thought, had been exhausted. Yet Brazil was actually more prosperous than ever, ex-

porting great quantities of sugar, tobacco, rice, indigo, and cotton. As Kenneth Maxwell points out in **Conflicts and Conspiracies: Brazil and Portugal, 1750–1808** (Cambridge, 1973), the Portuguese were well aware that "Portugal was neither the best nor the most essential part of the empire. . . . Brazil was the kernel, Portugal the shell."

When Napoleon invaded Portugal in 1807, the Portuguese court took refuge in Rio de Janeiro. The empire was ruled from Rio until 1821. Then, brought back to Lisbon, the monarchy was unable to reassert control over Brazilian affairs. Backed by the planter elite, Prince Dom Pedro in 1822 declared Brazil's independence from Portugal and proclaimed it an empire.

Brazil's path to independence is traced in **From Colony to Nation** (Johns Hopkins, 1975), edited by A. J. R. Russell-Wood. A good supplement is **Every Inch a King** (New York: Macmillan, 1950; Hale, 1972), a biography of Dom Pedro I by Sérgio Corrêa da Costa.

"A tropical Don Juan," writes Corrêa da Costa of Dom Pedro, "something of a throwback to his lusty grandfather, John V, he would lunge into the night, muffled like a conspirator, in search of gallant adventures. Riding on horseback, he would sometimes go so far as to draw back the curtains of passing litters or coaches, in search of beautiful ladies."

Economically, imperial Brazil was much like colonial Brazil, except that cultivation of coffee gradually came to replace that of sugar. Exports of coffee rose from a million sacks annually during the 1830s to more than five million sacks a year during the 1880s—accounting for 60 percent of Brazil's total exports.

The government in Rio drew much of its support from sugar planters in the northeast. But coffee production was based in the southern province of São Paulo. As that commodity's importance grew, the regional balance of power was upset. Self-made men, the coffee planters disliked the empire's aristocratic veneer and the obstacles the monarchy posed to their own ambitions. After slavery was abolished in 1888, disgruntled coffee planters joined with the military to overthrow the monarchy.

The result was creation of a republic, the so-called Old Republic (1889–1930), whose life coincided with four decades of dynamic economic growth. In the province of São Paulo, for example, planters did much more than simply cultivate coffee. They controlled most of the railroad system, and moved into banking, manufacturing, insurance, and commerce.

"Coffee was the basis of domestic industrial growth . . . and nearly all Brazilian entrepreneurs came from the planter elite," writes Warren Dean in *The Industrialization of São Paulo, 1880–1945* (Univ. of Tex., 1969).

The opportunities available in what was becoming Brazil's richest province attracted an unprecedented number of immigrants; between 1890 and 1910, some 1.8 million people, mostly Italians, Germans, Spaniards, and Portuguese, left Europe for Brazil. São Paulo mushroomed from a small town of 65,000 in 1890 to a densely populated state capital

of almost 600,000 in 1920. The impact of immigration is described by Rollie Poppino in *Brazil: The Land and the People* (Oxford, 1973, cloth & paper), a good general introduction to Brazilian society.

Brazil's economic modernization made obsolete a basically agrarian political system held together by shaky alliances and shady deals. In 1930, backed by the military, the populist governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Getúlio Vargas, turned out the old guard, established the "new state," and unequivocally pointed Brazil toward industrialization.

Yet if the Old Republic was unable to reconcile the competing claims of economic development and political democracy, neither was the Vargas regime. Nor have subsequent governments proved any more adept. This is the enduring dilemma of Brazilian history, and the focus of two excellent surveys—Peter Flynn's *Brazil: A Political Analysis* (Westview, 1978, cloth; 1979, paper) and E. Bradford Burns's *A History of Brazil* (Columbia, 1980, cloth & paper). Both books end with the first stirrings of *abertura*.

Whatever their nation's woes, Burns notes, Brazilians have always shown an irrepressible, perhaps naive, faith in the future. "In spite of you," wrote the popular composer Chico Buarque de Holanda, addressing the military regime during the early 1970s, "tomorrow will be another day." The lyrics were censored. The sentiment endures.

—James Lang

EDITOR'S NOTE: Professor Lang, a former Wilson Center Fellow, teaches in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Vanderbilt University. He is currently a Kellogg Fellow. For additional titles, readers should consult WQ's Background Books essay on Brazil appearing in the Autumn 1976 issue.