

# Book Review

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**Green, James N., Victoria Langland, and Lilia Moritz Schwarz, editors.**

*The Brazil Reader: History, Culture, Politics.* Duke UP, 2019.

How might a single volume successfully represent the history, culture, and politics of an entire nation, a modern Latin American nation, a Portuguese-speaking nation, one vast in size, home to hundreds of millions of people, with roots not only in the continent's pre-history, but also in Europe, Africa, and many other parts of the world? This was the dauntingly complex question confronting the distinguished historians James N. Green, Victoria Langland, and Lilia Moritz Schwarz when organizing a second edition of *The Brazil Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, originally edited by Robert M. Levine and John J. Crocitti in 1999. In response, they have produced a significantly revised compendium that introduces Brazil and its major themes and events through primary source documents in translation. The new edition boasts welcome advancements, especially in its heavily revamped selections for reading, its expanded expert commentary, and its updated organization. Over one hundred and twenty texts span almost 600 pages, organized in eleven sections through a "conventional historical periodization" (3). These readings take the form of "documents, essays, poems, manifestos, speeches, images, and other materials" that together guide the reader down "multiple paths for exploring and understanding how the legacies of the past continue to both inspire and weigh on Brazil today" (3). The volume brings forth diverse perspectives when presenting the nation's many political regime changes, the development of its economy, and its social structure, with special considerations for race, class, and gender.

Beginning with a translation of Pero Vaz de Caminha's letter to King Manuel I of Portugal in 1500 (not included in the original edition) and ending with a series of readings on "Redemocratization and the New Global Economy," *The Brazil Reader's* eleven sections closely follow the nation's progression, its booms and busts, from a Portuguese outpost interested in the export of *pau-brasil* to the complex global giant it is today. Alongside the carefully selected primary

source documents, each section begins with a clear and concise introduction while closing with a narrative portrait of an important figure of the time, presenting a multitude of Brazilian voices across the spectrum of possible experiences. The first three sections focus on the economic cycles of the earliest centuries (*pau-brasil*, sugar, gold), the incorporation of the indigenous, the experiences of enslaved African people, and the Inconfidência Mineira. Offering “a rare example of upward mobility within Brazilian slave society” (126), section III closes with a portrait of Chica da Silva de Oliveira, slave turned wealthy slaveowner through her marriage to a Portuguese diamond merchant.

The next three sections relate the major developments of the 1800s. Here the volume deftly combines memoir, fiction, poetry, political manifesto, travel writing, and visual art to highlight not only the intensity of the debates of the period, but also the flourishing of intellectual and artistic production that unfolded in that century. Encompassing the period after the arrival of the Portuguese crown in 1808 up to the establishment of the First Republic in 1889, the primary documents provide perspectives on regional revolts (Malê and Praieira), the rise of coffee as chief commodity, Brazil’s unethical and unsustainable dependence on slavery, the debates surrounding abolition, and the political machinations leading to the end of the empire. The editors’ portraits complement the readings by focusing on two members of the royal family, Empress Maria Leopoldina and her son, Emperor Dom Pedro II, as well as José Bonifácio, a key advisor to the crown.

The next four sections, covering the period from 1889 to 1985, provide insight into the early republic, “when the country experimented with new ideas about political authority, race and nation” (267), the turn towards industrialization under Getúlio Vargas (1930-45), the rise of communism as an alternative ideology, and the harsh realities of the military dictatorship (1964-85). Interspersed between documents conveying the intense political tensions of the period, such as Luís Carlos Prestes’s “Manifesto of the National Liberating Alliance” (1935), Vargas’s suicide letter (1954), and the military regime’s repressive “Institutional Act 5” (1968) that precipitated a “coup within the coup” (451), the volume also includes excerpts from the works of the century’s most noted intellectuals: Oswald de Andrade’s “Cannibalist Manifesto,” Gilberto Freire’s *The Masters and the Slaves*, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda’s *Roots of Brazil*, and Paulo Freire’s *Education as a Practice of Freedom*.

New voices focused on race, gender, and class emerge in the latter half of the twentieth century, as the impoverished and working-class perspectives of Carolina Maria de Jesus (*Child of the Dark*) and Joana Masi Zero (“The Life of a Factory Worker”) are given space alongside the trailblazing ideas of Abdias do Nascimento on race and Aguinaldo Silva regarding “LGBT Rights and Democracy.” These four sections close with portraits of artists, including two women—the modernist painter Tarsila do Amaral and the novelist and political activist Patrícia Galvão—as well as Oscar Niemeyer, the architect of Brasília, and the musicians Gilbert Gil and Caetano Veloso, leaders of the counterculture Tropicália movement. The final section, which includes the inaugural speech of Dilma Rousseff, an essay on the revolts of June 2013, and a portrait of the political revolutionary and AIDS awareness advocate Herbert Daniel, among other documents, brings the reader up to date with the key developments of the last twenty years.

Intended for a non-specialist audience, *The Brazil Reader* will prove a valuable resource for newcomers to the complex world of Brazilian politics, history, and culture. Expertly organized, it is hard to imagine a more accessible reference for anyone interested in Brazilian Studies. For this reason, the volume will find numerous use cases in university settings, whether it be in history, geography, or language and cultural studies. By way of suggestion, for the language classroom, it may be worthwhile to consider a version of the reader with primary source documents in the original Portuguese. A companion site with links and additional information on the topics covered would also be a welcome addition to the volume.

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