

Introduction

Brazil in 1950 was a very different country from the country it is today. In the space of one person's lifetime, Brazil has gone from being a traditional underdeveloped rural-dominated economy with a pre-modern demographic structure to a modern urban society. In 1950, it was only one-third urbanized and almost three-quarters of its labor force was involved in an agriculture which only partially fulfilled the nation's food needs. Poverty and hunger affected a significant share of the population. Life expectancy was reduced, and mortality and fertility were quite high by world standards. Given this demographic pattern, Brazil was a nation dominated by youth, who made up almost half of the population. It was also a predominantly illiterate society, with women less educated than men.

Today Brazil is over 80% urban, only a tenth of its labor force work in agriculture and hunger no longer significantly affects the population. It has become a more complex society with a large middle class and an organized working class now incorporated into a modern social welfare system. In the second decade of the twenty-first century it educates all of its children of primary school age, women are now better educated than men, and the birth and death rates along with life expectancy are close to first world standards.

The question we ask in this book is how and why this radical change occurred. In previous work we have looked at the economic changes which occurred in this period, first within the most dynamic of its regions, that of São Paulo, and then of the nation as a whole. Most recently we have examined in great detail the modernization of Brazilian agriculture in this period. But in our previous work the social changes have been only summarily treated and for this reason we have undertaken here a more systematic review of this subject.

There is no set standard of what a social history of a country should entail. Such a history could involve a study of labor relations, or the family or popular culture, or any number of alternative themes. Thus, each historian has approached this subject from their own perspective and each social history tends to be *sui generis*. In this work we have selected a series of different themes and institutions which we feel broadly defined Brazilian society from the mid-twentieth century until today. It is obvious that other scholars would stress different themes or take alternative approaches to examine the social changes which have occurred. What is evident to us is that Brazil experienced extraordinarily rapid change in just these 75 or so years, and this change has created a fundamentally different society from the one that existed in 1950.

Our concern is to try to understand the contours of this change and offer possible explanations for how and why they occurred. It is essentially a macrohistory rather than the microhistory which is now more common in certain historical traditions. But few before us have attempted such a macro analysis, and we thus see our work as a first attempt to define the fundamental changes which have taken place, a necessary first step in providing the context in which detailed microhistories can be produced.

We begin this study with an analysis of what Brazil looked like in 1950 in terms of economic and social conditions that existed before massive change had occurred. We then examine in a summary fashion the political and economic changes after 1950 that would shape Brazilian society in this period. One of the most important developments in this society was the profound change in demographic structure and patterns of behavior which occurred in the decade of the 1960s. It was then that Brazil began its demographic transition period, when fertility dropped dramatically, finally matching its slow mortality decline which had preceded this shift. In turn, a very rapid decline in mortality would now ultimately add twenty years to the life expectancy of the national population for women and sixteen years for men in this period of half a century. Just as significant as industrialization, agricultural modernization, and the demographic transition, has been the role of the national government in influencing Brazilian societal change in this period. It was in the post-1950 period that a modern welfare state program was finally implanted in Brazil, the creation of which profoundly altered the lives and income of the entire national population. All of these changes have occurred as millions of Brazilians have migrated to the rapidly expanding cities as the majority of the population has shifted from rural to urban residence. The rise of the metropolis and its impact on Brazilian society is the theme we treat in the first chapter.

Having outlined the basic structural changes, we then move on to specific groups and themes. Clearly, the changing role of woman in society is the one

gender issue which has experienced the most change. In the post-1950 period women have massively increased their participation in the workplace and have now come to be better educated than the men in Brazilian society, in a reversal of pre-1950 patterns. Changes in fertility have also had their impact on family size, and the introduction of civil divorce and the decline of the Roman Catholic Church have also impacted on women and the family.

All this change in the economy and society has led to quite different patterns of social mobility and class structure. As Brazil began massively to industrialize, there was initially a relatively open period of mobility when large numbers of previously poor persons achieved ever higher status and income than their parents. But soon this same system slowly closed down again as Brazil becomes a modern industrial society; class mobility has become more circular and mobility into the top groups has slowed. One of the ongoing historical issues still facing Brazil, as in all American societies with histories of African slave labor, is the question of race. This is an issue in constant debate and discussion in Brazil and we try to present all the conflicting issues on this theme.

The creation of a modern welfare state has been of crucial importance in bringing the Brazilian population a new level of health and welfare that is far more universal than ever before. Finally codified in almost all its aspects in the Constitution of 1988, the Brazilian welfare state for all its inefficiencies and financial constraints has had a major impact in reducing regional inequality – a theme we stress in all the chapters. There have been shifts in the economic importance and per capita GDP of some regions, and here the rise of the Center-West to co-equal economic status with the traditionally richer South and Southeastern states is fundamental. But other regions, above all the Northeast, have not kept pace and are clearly economically well below the norm of the three richest regions. But, in terms of health, demographic characteristics, welfare, and life expectancy, there is now a national standard that is the norm in all regions, and this is largely due to government action, both in creating a modern welfare system and in the adoption of cash transfers to the poor and unincorporated part of the population.

Finally, we examine an unusual and quite new feature of Brazilian society which mostly developed in the post-1950 period, which is the rise of voluntary organizations. Since the foundation of the Republic in 1899, religious groups have been essentially voluntary associations with no state aid. But, since the massive civil opposition to military rule in the 1970s and 1980s, Brazil has developed a vast array of non-state voluntary non-religious (social) organizations which play an increasingly important role in society. They exist in areas of environmental protection, education, health, and

organized labor. There has also been a major shift in religious associations with the recent rapid expansion of evangelical churches, of massive size, with profound political power. Although traditionally it has been assumed that civil society in Brazil was weak to non-existent, we find that this thesis does not hold for the nation today.

In this text we have converted standard Brazilian color terms into the English words white (*branco*), brown (*pardo* or *mulato*), and black (*preto*). These are usually self-defined categories in all censuses and surveys and so often shift with changing national beliefs on race and identity. Sometimes government data list results for a combined Afro-Brazilian population which we define as browns and blacks (*pardos* and *pretos* combined). Throughout the book we reproduce finding on race based on these criteria.

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