

Reviews

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Leslie Bethell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 9: *Brazil since 1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. xv + 616, £80.00; \$150.00, hb.

We all owe Leslie Bethell a huge debt of gratitude for the monumental contribution he has made to Latin American studies. With this long-awaited volume, Bethell has (almost) brought to a close more than three decades of collaboration with hundreds of scholars in multiple languages on several continents – a labour that has produced ten volumes (with vol. 6 in two parts). When planning began for the *Cambridge History of Latin America* in the late 1970s, Bethell could surely not have imagined the length and scale of the task he would carry out. Volumes 1 and 2 were published in 1984, followed by vols. 3–8, 10 and 11 over the next twelve years. Sections of these volumes were published in paperback versions for classroom use over the same period – another dozen or so books. Bethell's duties as the founder and director of the Centre for Brazilian Studies in the University of Oxford after 1997 delayed this final volume on Brazil, his own area of specialisation. Translations in Spanish (Barcelona), Portuguese (São Paulo) and Chinese (Beijing) are in process (hence the use of 'almost brought to a close' above).

After the long delay, Bethell took the lead role in writing, as well as editing, this volume on Brazil since 1930. He is the principal author of the first four chapters on politics, with the assistance of Celso Castro and Jairo Nicolau. Marcelo de Paiva Abreu is the lead author for three chapters on economics, with the assistance of Rogério L. F. Werneck. Nelson do Valle Silva finishes the volume with a long chapter on Brazilian society. Missing are chapters on Brazilian intellectual and cultural life, a gap Bethell explains by noting the coverage given the topic in vol. 10, *Latin America since 1930: Ideas, Culture and Society* (1995).

These essays and bibliographies now become the standard reference source on Brazilian economic and political history since 1930. The authors clearly and cogently survey the political and economic history of Brazil with chapters built around the standard periodisation: 1930–45, 1945–64, 1964–85 and 1985–present. These chapters describe a Brazil that moves from 'a huge, poorly integrated country with a population of only ten million in 1872 and with little sense of national identity' (p. 5) to a highly urban, literate nation of more than 170 million by the beginning of the twentieth century. At the core of this political history is the rise and influence of Getúlio Vargas in the middle decades of the century. As Bethell points out, it was Vargas' *Estado Novo* that represented 'the final defeat of regional oligarchical political power in Brazil' (p. 53) and made possible the creation of an integrated nation through centralisation of power and cultural policy. The nationalisation of the educational system under Vargas and his minister of education and public health, Gustavo Capanema, helped transform Brazil into a nation with school curriculum as *o cimento da brasilidade* (p. 61). From 1945 to 1964, Brazil experienced mass politics for the first time as more than 80 per cent of the country's 7.5 million voters went to the

polls in 1945. By 1960, the number of eligible voters had surged to 18.5 million; this number had risen to 82 million by 1989, and more than 100 million at the beginning of this century. Bethell's description of the major political parties in the postwar period is excellent, and he walks us through the incredibly complex political crises with great clarity, including a very balanced analysis of the 1964 military coup. The sections on the military regime are the best short survey (less than 70 pages) now available. The 'New' Republic since 1985, although incredibly complex from the point of view of political parties and coalitions, is also very clearly sketched out. Bethell emphasises the constant search for a stable majority in Congress and the centre-right, pragmatic politics of the period. Despite the country's enormous advances, he notes that Brazil is 'a democracy of voters ... not yet a democracy of citizens' (p. 273).

Marcelo de Paiva Abreu's three chapters on economics will be tougher going for the quantitatively faint of heart. These chapters are an excellent overview providing a nice road map of shifting policies and trends. Abreu is not shy about expressing his views on the many economic plans that have been implemented, and offers cogent explanations of the numerous shock plans of the 1980s and 1990s. According to Abreu, 'The striking feature of the Brazilian economy during the period 1930–1945 was its ability to recover rapidly from the consequences of the 1928–1933 Depression' (p. 316). These chapters provide a concise analysis of postwar industrialisation. Abreu does an especially good job of showing the great accomplishments and political acumen of Juscelino Kubitschek, and of describing Kubitschek's legacy of 'macroeconomic mismanagement' that contributed to the economic and political crisis of the early 1960s. After 1964 the military regime pursued a path of high growth that produced the astonishing growth rates – 11.2 per cent per annum from 1968 to 1973 – of the so-called 'economic miracle'. The critique of the Geisel administration's refusal to 'stand a recession' in the late 1970s in the face of the oil shocks leads Abreu to note that 'It was perhaps dictatorial rule that could not stand a recession' (p. 385). Despite the major misjudgements of the military regime, Abreu points out that the generals did accomplish a great deal, in particular removing anti-export bias in economic policies and diversifying exports. For those who have puzzled over the astonishing array of failed economic plans in the 1980s and 1990s, Abreu provides clear and concise explanations of each of them. He characterises the period from 1980 to 1994 as 'a transitional period following the particularly severe balance-of-payments and debt crisis at the beginning of the 1980s' (p. 428). He concludes these chapters with a 'postscript' on the first two years of the Lula administration emphasising the stability and continuity that have marked the Brazilian economy since 1994.

Nelson do Valle Silva's long chapter on Brazilian society since 1930 is also a very fine synthesis of an enormous bibliography and a wealth of data on everything from race to vital statistics. One of the striking features of his analysis is the amount of social mobility apparent in Brazil since 1930 and the recent, rural origins of Brazilians, who are now mostly urban dwellers (over 85 per cent). He zeroes in on the great advances made in education and literacy while noting the enormous problems still confronting Brazil in the area of investment in human capital. His analysis of inequality is notable not only for what it shows about Brazil, but also for the nature of the data used to measure inequalities. Silva's discussion of race and the literature on race relations is a wonderful short introduction to the field. The statistics on violence and its rapid rise since 1980 lead him to conclude that

'The question of violence is probably the most serious social problem Brazil faces on the threshold of the twenty-first century' (pp. 462–3). He concludes his essay, and the volume, by pointing out that 'Brazil is an extremely dynamic society with a high degree of social mobility, especially the mobility brought about by structural changes (such as industrialisation and urbanisation), but at the same time there is an extremely rigid class structure that is highly resistant to change' (p. 520). That sentence, and this volume, are an outstanding synthesis of Brazil since 1930.

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Mariana L. R. Dantas, *Black Townsmen: Urban Slavery and Freedom in the Eighteenth-Century Americas* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. xiv + 280, £42.50, hb.

What did Sabará, Minas Gerais and Baltimore, Maryland have in common? At first glance, not much. Sabará flourished as a booming gold-mining town in the first half of the eighteenth century and relied on the labour of thousands of slaves by 1750, when Baltimore had a total population of 200. The North American town developed in the latter half of the century as a commercial and ship-building centre, but still trailed Sabará in size by the end of the century. Located deep in Brazil's interior, Sabará lacked connection to major Atlantic trading routes, while Baltimore enjoyed direct access to the sea. Whereas in 1810 only 10 per cent of Baltimore's population was enslaved and another 12 per cent consisted of free or freed blacks and mulattos, in Sabará a third were enslaved and over half free or freed.

Yet Professor Dantas makes an excellent case for the comparability of these two urban centres and the role played by Africans and their descendants in their respective transformations. In both towns the labour of slaves was key to economic growth. In an urban environment with diversified economic activities, slave owners required workers to labour without constant supervision and therefore to exercise both skill and individual initiative. To this end slave owners granted or promised freedom to many, and used the example of the freed to encourage the labour of the still enslaved. Both cities ended up with a larger proportion of free and freed blacks and mulattos than other cities in their respective countries. In this way, non-whites gained significant leverage.

Having established comparability, Dantas turns to the differences. A common practice in Sabará was to let slaves find their own work for a wage, returning a fixed amount to their owners on a daily or weekly basis. Any surplus was the slave's to keep, and so the possibility existed of saving enough to buy their freedom. In Baltimore it was much more common to convert the slave's status to that of an indentured servant for a fixed term of years. As for outright manumission, men were much more frequently freed in Baltimore than were women, while in Sabará the situation was reversed, cascading into a greater number being born free in the Brazilian city. Slave children in Sabará had a much higher chance of being freed than those in Baltimore. A far wider range of occupations was open to the free-born in Sabará, and these even included participation in the officially sanctioned civilian militia and positions in the state bureaucracy. The freed in Sabará even came to own slaves of their own, a situation rare in Baltimore.