A Concise History of Brazil, Second Edition

The second edition of *A Concise History of Brazil* offers a sweeping yet accessible history of Latin America’s largest country. Boris Fausto examines Brazil’s history from the arrival of the Portuguese in the New World through the long and sometimes rocky transition from independence in 1822 to democracy in the twentieth century. In a completely new chapter, his son Sergio Fausto, a prominent political scientist, brings the history up to the present, focusing on Brazil’s increasing global economic importance as well as its continued democratic development and the challenges the country faces to meet the higher expectations of its people.

Boris Fausto is a renowned Brazilian historian and political scientist. He is a retired professor of political science at the University of São Paulo.

Sergio Fausto is a political scientist and executive director of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso Institute, a Brazilian think tank.
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With contributions by
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Translated by Arthur Brakel
To Cynira Stocco Fausto, in memoriam
CONTENTS

List of Maps page xi
Preface xiii

1 COLONIAL BRAZIL (1500–1822) 1
  1.1 Overseas Expansion and the Portuguese Arrival in Brazil 1
  1.2 The Indians 7
  1.3 Colonization 9
  1.4 Colonial Society 25
  1.5 Economic Activities 34
  1.6 The Iberian Union and Its Impact on Brazil 40
  1.7 Colonization of the Periphery 44
  1.8 Bandeira Expeditions and Paulista Society 47
  1.9 The Crisis in the Colonial System 54
  1.10 Rebel Movements and National Consciousness 59
  1.11 Brazil at the End of the Colonial Period 72

2 IMPERIAL BRAZIL (1822–1889) 75
  2.1 Consolidating Independence and Building the State 75
  2.2 The Second Empire 94
  2.3 Socioeconomic Structure and Slavery 101
  2.4 Modernization and the Expansion of Coffee 109
# Contents

2.5 The Beginning of Large-Scale Immigration 114  
2.6 The Paraguayan War 117  
2.7 Crises of the Second Empire 124  
2.8 The Republican Movement 130  
2.9 The Fall of the Monarchy 136  
2.10 Economy and Demography 137  

3 The First Republic (1889–1930) 144  
3.1 Years of Consolidation 144  
3.2 Oligarchies and Colonels 153  
3.3 Relations Between the States and the Union 156  
3.4 Socioeconomic Changes 162  
3.5 Social Movements 174  
3.6 The Political Process During the 1920s 178  
3.7 The 1930 Revolution 186  

4 The Vargas State (1930–1945) 193  
4.1 Government Action 193  
4.2 The Political Process 198  
4.3 The Estado Novo 210  
4.4 The End of the Estado Novo 223  
4.5 The Socioeconomic Situation 228  

5 The Democratic Experiment (1945–1964) 231  
5.1 The Elections and the New Constitution 231  
5.2 The Return of Vargas 236  
5.3 Vargas’s Fall 242  
5.4 From Nationalism to Developmentism 246  

6.1 Conservative Modernization 273  
6.2 Political Closure and Armed Struggle 280  
6.3 The Processes of Political Liberalization 288  
6.4 The General Framework of the Period from 1950 to 1980 312  

7.1 Introduction 324
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Democratization and Uncontrolled Inflation: The José Sarney Government</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 Political Crisis and Economic Change: The Brief Term of Fernando Collor in Office</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 The Itamar Franco Government: From Political Crisis to the Real Plan</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 The FHC Government: Economic Stabilization and Structural Reforms</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6 Democracy and Social Rights</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7 (In)security and (Un)employment: The Crisis in the Metropolises</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8 Foreign Policy: Autonomy through Integration</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.9 Damned or Blessed Legacy?</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.10 Alternation in Power: Lula’s Victory</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.11 The Formation of the New Government</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.12 Lula and Coalitional Presidency</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.13 Acceleration of Growth</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.14 Social Policy: More Continuity than Rupture</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.15 Political Crisis and the Crisis of Politics: The Succession of Scandals</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.16 A “New Development Model”?</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.17 The Pre-salt Controversy</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.18 Growth and the Environment</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.19 Brazil’s Position in the Negotiations on Climate Change</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.20 The Identity of Foreign Policy</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.21 Lula’s Succession</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.22 Democracy under Lula</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.23 Conclusion</td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Bibliography

417

### Index

425
## LIST OF MAPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Map Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Brazil before and after the Treaty of Madrid, 1750</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Writing a synthetic history of Brazil for an English-language readership entails a set of challenges that I feel I must make explicit.

Beginning with the presupposition that there is scant familiarity with Brazilian history in the English-speaking world, I chose to emphasize historical narrative and introduce my readers to a body of knowledge which I consider fundamental. This choice has obvious advantages. Among them, it avoids taking gaps in readers’ knowledge for granted. However, at the same time, to lead readers along a path in a historical narrative is methodologically outdated and could result in a superficial understanding of important events.

I tried to minimize this shortcoming by combining narrative with discussions of central themes in the Brazilian historical process: e.g., the nature of Brazilian slavery, Brazil’s remaining united once it became an independent country, and the characteristics of its recent transition from an authoritarian government to a democratic one.

I have also sought to inform readers about the more significant historiographical controversies when such controversies make way for different interpretations of the past as well as when they demonstrate that history is a body of knowledge subject to constant reappraisal and refinement.

As they get into the book, readers will become more aware of my working premises, but there is at least one more that should be made clear. I have rejected two opposing tendencies in discussing the Brazilian historical process. On the one hand, I have rejected
the tendency to consider Brazilian history as an evolutionary trend characterized by constant progress. This is a simplistic point of view that events in recent years have belied. On the other hand, I have also rejected the point of view that emphasizes inertia – that suggests, for example, that problems caused by political patronage, by corruption, and by the state’s impositions on society have been the same and have not changed over the years.

Oddly, the latter proclivity has been associated both with revolutionary ideologies and with conservative outlooks. For revolutionaries, their view of political and social domination as, for all intents and purposes, one and the same leads them to the notion that efforts in the interest of gradual change are useless. They prefer abrupt cuts. Conservative thinkers who share this inertial point of view tend to be skeptical of change; or, in their more elaborated thinking, they are in favor of intervention by an authoritarian government whose objective is to impose new directions on the country.

My exposition takes a position contrary to both points of view. On a step-by-step basis, I have attempted to show that in the midst of continuity and accommodation, Brazil changes – sometimes in the political sphere, sometimes socioeconomically, and at times in both arenas.

I should also point out that strictly speaking, cultural manifestations are not the object of this text. This deliberate omission is not meant to slight culture. I have decided to leave out culture because the interrelatedness of sociopolitical and cultural phenomena, owing to their complexity and importance, deserves to be dealt with in a book wholly on that subject.

Taking into account the purpose of this book, I have not included any notes containing marginal observations and references to sources. If this has made the text lighter reading, it has, simultaneously, presented me with a problem. Much of this book is indebted to the work of other authors which I have selected and incorporated for my own purposes. How can I not quote them without being unjust and without running the risk of being accused of plagiarism? I have tried to solve this dilemma in the Bibliography at the end. My references do not exhaust all the sources I consulted and do not mention all the basic bibliography. I have included only
those texts I consulted in the writing of this book. Of course, my using them indicates that I consider them important.

Finally, I would like to thank my friend and colleague Herbert S. Klein, whose suggestions and considerations encouraged me to write this book.