

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58515-6 - Father of the Poor?: Vargas and his Era

Robert M. Levine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

This book examines the life, times, and legacy of Getúlio Vargas, Brazil's dictator and president during most of the period from 1930 to 1954. Levine's chief concern is how Vargas's legacy influenced Brazil, and to what extent his social legislation affected people's lives. Vargas ignored individual rights, working for state-regulated citizenship without disharmony, without the right to dissent. His revolution was partial, one in which new constituencies and rules were grafted onto traditional political practices. Vargas devoted as much effort to manipulating workers as he did to benefiting them. By the end of his long tenure in power, some things had hardly changed at all: the readiness of the armed forces to intervene; the elite's tenacious hold on privilege; and the historical predominance of the Center-South. Brazil's distribution of income remained among the least equitable in the world, but Vargas did not perceive this as a problem that needed to be solved. That Vargas promised more than he delivered did not diminish the adulation that Brazilians held for him. Ordinary people would shrug and say: *O presidente sempre lembrou da gente* ("the president always remembered us").

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58515-6 - Father of the Poor?: Vargas and his Era

Robert M. Levine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

FATHER OF THE POOR?

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58515-6 - Father of the Poor?: Vargas and his Era

Robert M. Levine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NEW APPROACHES TO THE AMERICAS

Edited by Stuart Schwartz, Yale University

ALSO PUBLISHED IN THE SERIES:

Noble David Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492–1650*

FORTHCOMING IN THE SERIES:

Alberto Flores Galindo (translated by Carlos Aguirre and Charles Walker), *In Search of an Inca*

Sandra Lauderdale Graham, *Slavery in Nineteenth-Century Brazil*

Gilbert Joseph and Patricia Pessar, *Rethinking Rural Protest in Latin America*

Herbert Klein, *A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*

John McNeill, *Epidemics and Geopolitics in the American Tropics*

Susan Socolow, *Women in Colonial Latin America*

Eric Van Young, *Popular Rebellion in Mexico, 1810–1821*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58515-6 - Father of the Poor?: Vargas and his Era

Robert M. Levine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

FATHER
OF THE POOR?

VARGAS AND HIS ERA

ROBERT M. LEVINE

University of Miami,

Coral Gables



Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-58515-6 - Father of the Poor?: Vargas and his Era
 Robert M. Levine
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
 São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521585156

© Robert M. Levine 1998

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
 no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
 permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1998

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Levine, Robert M.

Father of the poor? : Vargas and his era / Robert M. Levine.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 0-521-58515-5. – ISBN 0-521-58528-7 (pb)

1. Vargas, Getúlio, 1883–1954. 2. Brazil – Politics and
 government – 1930–1945. 3. Brazil – Politics and
 government – 1945–1954. 4. Brazil – Economic policy. 5. Brazil –
 Social policy. I. Title.

F2538.L48 1997

981.06'1'092 – dc21 97-11309

CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-58515-6 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-58528-6 Paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2010

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or
 accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in
 this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,
 or will remain, accurate or appropriate. Information regarding prices, travel
 timetables and other factual information given in this work are correct at
 the time of first printing but Cambridge University Press does not guarantee
 the accuracy of such information thereafter.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58515-6 - Father of the Poor?: Vargas and his Era

Robert M. Levine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

For Peggy

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58515-6 - Father of the Poor?: Vargas and his Era

Robert M. Levine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page ix
1	Introduction: Vargas as Enigma	1
2	In the Saddle, 1883–1937	13
3	The Estado Novo, 1937–1945	50
4	Populism, Vargas Style, 1945–1954	75
5	Different Getúlios	97
6	Vargas’s Incomplete Revolution	112
	Appendix A. Chronology	139
	Appendix B. Contemporary Sources	146
	Appendix C. Photographs	162
	<i>Bibliographic Essay</i>	180
	<i>Index</i>	187

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58515-6 - Father of the Poor?: Vargas and his Era

Robert M. Levine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Much has changed since I went to Brazil to begin my dissertation research in May 1964, less than two months after the military coup that overthrew Brazil's constitutional government. I intended to study the Vargas period, not knowing at the time that the military regime, wary of the late president's popularity, would make Getúlio Vargas a "nonperson." In fact, Vargas's daughter Alzira may have granted me permission to use her father's archive because she felt that Brazilian historians were reluctant to write about the Vargas era. After 1968, the dictatorship turned repressive. When my book on the Vargas regime was published by Columbia University Press in 1970, several Brazilian publishers contacted me for publication rights, but two different translation drafts were rejected by police censors. The book finally appeared in Brazil ten years later, when briefly it became a best seller, perhaps because readers saw parallels between the post-1964 military regime still in power and the authoritarian Vargas years that I had analyzed.

After the military government yielded to civilian rule during the mid-1980s, interest in Vargas rekindled. CPDOC, a Rio de Janeiro research center established at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, put teams of staff members to work collecting and cataloging documents and taking depositions from Vargas-era elites. Books and theses began to appear, but few concentrated on Vargas himself or on the impact of his social and nationalist programs. It is telling that there still is no updated, full-scale biography of Vargas; nor is there a detailed analysis of the *Estado Novo*, the 1946 Constitution, Vargas's relations with the military, his foreign policy, or his final term. Equally important, we have no studies addressing the lives of ordinary people during the Vargas era. Vargas's personal journal covering the years between 1930 and 1942 has now been edited

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58515-6 - Father of the Poor?: Vargas and his Era

Robert M. Levine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

by his granddaughter, forty-one years after his death, but the diary entries for the most part are dry and sketchy. Vargas never revealed his reactions or motives, even to himself.

This book, an interpretive synthesis based on many years of studying Vargas and modern Brazil, considers a series of fundamental questions. How did Vargas influence the evolution of the Brazilian state? How did Brazil change from 1930 to 1954? What was Vargas's political legacy? How far did Vargas's reforms change day-to-day life, not only in the major cities but throughout the vast country? And why did millions of Brazilians come to revere him if he acted, as wags claimed, not only as "father of the poor" but "mother to the rich"?

Funds for the study came from a collaborative research grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities supplemented by resources from the University of Miami. Matching support was provided by the Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce of Florida, the Americas Foundation, Bank Cafeeiro, the Embraer Corporation, Varig Airlines, Robert J. Duffy, and Michael Bander.

I am, of course, responsible for the final result. I wish to give special thanks to the beleaguered National Endowment for the Humanities, which was willing to consider my grant application even though my computer (and our house) had been knocked out by Hurricane Andrew in August 1992. Some of the pages of the grant application, in fact, mailed right before the deadline, were water-stained. I appreciate the NEH staff's understanding during those difficult days. I am deeply appreciative of everything the NEH has done to assist scholarship in this country, and hope that the U.S. Congress will come to its senses and increase this agency's budget in the years ahead.

Persons who helped included Nancy Naro; Michael La Rosa; Ann D. Witte; Mai Lai; and Carmen Fernández; Ângela de Castro Gomes and Marieta de Moraes Ferreira (CPDOC); Juliano Spyer, Eric Vanden Bussche (USP); Andréa Casa Nova Maia (Belo Horizonte); Cristina Mehrtens, John J. Crocitti, Bill Smith, and Quélia Quaresma (University of Miami); and Maria da Graça Salgado and Sérgio Murilo D. Zarro (Rio de Janeiro). More than anyone else, José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy aided every stage of this project. He is an indefatigable colleague and a sensitive and empathetic friend as well.