

## Brazil

This book is the first modern survey of the economic and social history of Brazil from early man to today. Drawing from a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data, it provides a comprehensive overview of the major developments that defined the evolution of Brazil. Beginning with the original human settlements in pre-Columbian society, it moves on to discuss the Portuguese empire and colonization, specifically the importance of slave labor, sugar, coffee and gold in shaping Brazil's economic and societal development. Finally, it analyzes the revolutionary changes that have occurred in the past half century, transforming Brazil from a primarily rural and illiterate society to an overwhelmingly urban, literate and industrial one. Sweeping and influential, Herbert S. Klein and Francisco Vidal Luna's synthesis is the first of its kind on Brazil.

Herbert S. Klein is Gouverneur Morris Professor Emeritus of History at Columbia University, the former director of the Center of Latin American Studies and Professor of History, Stanford University. Specializing in the social, demographic and economic history of Latin America, he has published over thirty books and 190 articles in several languages.

Francisco Vidal Luna is Professor of Economics in the Faculty of Economics and Administration (FEA) at the Universidade de São Paulo. He served as Secretary of Planning in the state government of São Paulo. He is co-author (with Herbert S. Klein) of numerous books on Brazil and has published over thirty-five articles in English and Portuguese.

# Brazil

*An Economic and Social History from Early Man  
to the 21st Century*

**HERBERT S. KLEIN**

*Columbia University and Stanford University*

**FRANCISCO VIDAL LUNA**

*Universidade de São Paulo*



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To  
*Frank Smith*

## Contents

<i>List of Graphs</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>List of Maps</i>	xiii
<i>List of Tables</i>	xv
<i>Preface</i>	xvii
1 The Setting – Climate and Soils of Brazil	1
2 The Peopling of Brazil to 1700	23
3 The Colonial Economy and Society	67
4 The Nineteenth-Century Economy	107
5 Nineteenth-Century Society	149
6 Industrialization and Urbanization	192
7 Liberalization and Globalization	248
<i>Bibliography</i>	299
<i>Index</i>	353

## Graphs

1.1	Sources of electricity in the world	<i>page</i> 11
1.2	Source of electricity in Brazil	12
1.3	The world's major petroleum producers, BPD, 2021 (% world total)	14
2.1	Estimated origin of slaves arriving in Brazil 1561–1700	62
2.2	Estimated arrival of African slaves by principal region in Brazil 1561–1700	63
3.1	Estimate of sugar production in Brazil in selected years 1560–1834	70
3.2	Estimates of gold production 1699–1799	79
3.3	Estimated Brazilian diamond imports to Europe 1729–1791 (tons)	79
3.4	Brazilian sugar production in selected years 1839–1909	98
3.5	Share of sugar exports from the principal exporting regions of Brazil 1796–1830	99
3.6	Cotton exports from Maranhão in selected years between 1760 and 1807	100
3.7	Average annual tobacco exports from Brazil by quinquennium 1671–1830	101
3.8	Cuban and Brazilian coffee exports 1804–1850	101
3.9	Sugar and coffee exports from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in selected years between 1825 and 1848	102
3.10	Estimated volume of the African slave arrivals in Brazil by quinquennium 1701–1705 to 1845–1850	105
3.11	Share of African arrivals by major Brazilian port 1701–1705 to 1826–1830	105

x	<i>List of Graphs</i>	
4.1	The value, quantity and average price of coffee in pounds sterling 1821–1913	119
4.2	Value of Brazilian sugar exports 1821–1900	120
4.3a	Brazilian exports of cotton 1862–1887 (in metric tons)	124
4.3b	Import of Brazilian cotton to Great Britain 1860–1884 (in bales of cotton)	124
4.4	Composition of the value of exports from Minas Gerais 1818–1884	134
4.5	Brazilian exports, imports and trade balance 1821–1913 (revised series)	135
4.6	Fiscal income and expenditure of the Empire 1823–1889	137
4.7	Arrival of slaves and foreign immigrants to Brazil 1781–1785 to 1906–1910	143
5.1	Infant mortality rate for selected countries in the mid-nineteenth century	163
5.2	Life expectancy of all males and females in 1872 (upper bound estimate)	167
5.3	Life expectancy at birth of selected Latin American countries around 1900	167
5.4a	Age and gender of total slave population in São Paulo province 1829 (n = 72,748)	174
5.4b	Age pyramid of African-born slaves in São Paulo province 1829 (n = 53,536)	174
6.1	Brazilian coffee production and world consumption of coffee 1890–1939	206
6.2	Prices, production and destruction of coffee and Brazilian participation in the world market 1924–1952	208
6.3	World production of coffee and Brazilian coffee exports in volume and as a share of world production 1815–2019	209
6.4	Relative importance of Brazilian states in coffee production 1931–2019	209
6.5	Variation in GDP and GDP by industry 1926–1947	211
6.6	Variation in GDP 1958–1990	216
6.7	Fiscal deficit and annual change in M1 and inflation 1950–1982	217
6.8	Average life expectancy by gender 1939–1941 and 1995–2000	231
6.9	Crude birth (CBR) and death rate (CDR) and natural increase 1881–2000	231
6.10	Age-specific fertility 1903 and 2000	233

*List of Graphs*

xi

6.11	Age pyramid of Brazilian population in 1900 and 1995	235
7.1	Balance of trade and current transactions 1990–2019	252
7.2	GDP, primary fiscal balance result and unemployment 2003–2010	258
7.3	International reserves of Brazil 1980–2020 (US\$ billions)	258
7.4	Exchange rate, effective exchange rate for manufacturers and salary exchange ratio 1991–2019	261
7.5	Cumulative change in general and sectoral GDP 1990–2019 (1990 = 100)	261
7.6	Rate of investment and % industry in GDP 1995–2019	267
7.7	Infant mortality rate by region 2000–2016	269
7.8	Life expectancy by gender and region 2000 and 2020	270
7.9	Total fertility rate by region 2000–2022	271
7.10	Age pyramid of Brazilian population in 2000 and 2020	272
7.11	Labor force participation of Brazilian men and women aged fifteen and older in selected years between 1960 and 2021	274
7.12	Percentage of persons aged between eighteen and twenty- four attending university by gender and region, Census 2010	276



## Maps

1.1	South America and Brazil, including the Brazilian states	<i>page</i> 2
1.2	Biomes of Brazil	3
1.3	Main river basins of Brazil	8
1.4	Main mineral and hydrocarbon centers of Brazil	13
1.5	Current regions and states of Brazil	15
2.1	Coastal Brazil, c. 1560	44
2.2	Donatary captancies and founding dates of sixteenth-century towns	54

## Tables

1.1	Areas destined for the protection and preservation of native vegetation and other land uses in Brazil 2018	<i>page</i> 16
1.2	Area, population and population density of Brazil (census 2010)	19
3.1	Composition of the population of Minas Gerais from 1767–1833	73
3.2	Cane and sugar beet production by region in selected years 1791–1842 (in metric tons)	99
3.3	Estimated population of Brazil, enslaved and free in 1818	104
4.1	Ratio of Brazilian coffee in world commerce 1881–1930	109
4.2	Arrival of immigrants to major importing countries 1870–1930	112
4.3	Importance of principal products exported by Brazil 1821–1939 (value in £1,000)	126
4.4	Brazilian imports by product and country 1849–1850, 1872–1873 and 1904	129
4.5	Nationally produced merchandise imported from the provinces into the port of Rio de Janeiro 1849–1850	131
4.6	Nationally produced merchandise imported and exported nationally and internationally from the port of Rio de Janeiro 1888 (in milréis)	133
4.7	African slaves disembarked to major Brazilian regions 1801–1860	140
4.8	Distribution of the Brazilian population in 1872 by gender, color and condition	140
4.9	Arrival of free immigrants by country of origin 1870–1915	142

4.10	Population of Brazil by region and gender in 1890	145
5.1	Occupations in Brazil in 1872 census	155
5.2	Mortality by age in the capital of São Paulo 1894–1929	165
5.3	Estimates of crude birth, death and natural growth rates in Brazil 1798–1900	169
5.4	Arrival of Major Immigrant Groups to Brazil, 1870–1930	170
5.5	Annual average growth of the population of Brazil by regions and provinces (states) 1819, 1872, 1900	171
5.6	Pre-1872 census population of selected provinces by color and legal status	173
5.7	Marriage rates among adults by gender, color and status in two provinces 1830 and 1842	175
5.8	Origin of free Immigrants to Brazil 1835–1969	182
5.9	Growth of state capitals 1872–1900	188
6.1	Brazilian industry in the censuses of 1907 and 1920, by state (values in milréis)	198
6.2	Brazilian industry in the censuses of 1907 and 1920, by type of product (values in milréis)	200
6.3	Civil status of Brazilians aged eighteen and older 1960–2010	237
7.1	Principal economic indicators – 1991–2002	256
7.2	Cultivated areas, production and productivity of the principal crops of Brazil, harvests of 1976–1977 and 2022–2023	262
7.3	Trade balance of agribusiness in Brazil 1994–2021	264
7.4	Principal economic indicators – 2003–2010 (government of Lula)	266
7.5	Ratio of children enrolled in school as percentage of their age cohort by residence, gender, color and income 2018	277
7.6	Distribution of basic household services by urban and rural residence 1960–2010	289

## Preface

The aim of this book is to provide a synthesis of the economic and social evolution of Brazil from the arrival of the first humans until the present day. It is based on three decades of collaborative research on the economic and social history of this fascinating nation. Brazil is one of the largest and most important nations in the world today. Its current population of 213 million people makes it the fifth most populated nation in the world and its 8 million square kilometers of territory makes it the sixth largest country in the world. It accounts for half the population and area of South America and it has become one of the most powerful agricultural economies on the planet along with having the largest industrial establishment in the region. It was the home of some of the earliest domestications of plants in America and also the first American region to create an African slave plantation system, which became the norm for most of the rest of the Americas.

Brazil was also the only non-republican nation created in America in the nineteenth century and its imperial government was a mark of stability in a particularly violent period in the region. Brazil was known for its primary products which had a major impact on world markets, from sugarcane, gold and diamonds, and rubber, to cotton and most of all for coffee. It was coffee which dominated the economy until the middle of the twentieth century. Since then, Brazil carried out one of the more successful import substitution industrializations in the world as well as modernizing its agriculture, all done within a closed economy.

Until the 1970s, Brazil experienced one of the world's most rapid economic growth processes, which continued for forty years and allowed the per capita income to be multiplied by five between 1940 and 1980.

Unfortunately, like other developing countries, the country was profoundly affected by the international crisis of the 1980s. That external crisis led the country to declare a moratorium, and demonstrated the exhaustion of the model of forced industrialization, protected and financed by the state. But all this changed in the 1990s when the economy was liberalized and Brazil was opened to the world. With that opening has come a relative decline in industry and a massive growth of agriculture to such an extent that Brazil is one of the most important granaries in the world today and now dominates world markets in numerous animal and grain products.

There have also been massive social changes as the country moved from being an overwhelmingly rural and illiterate society to a literate and urban one beginning only in the second half of the twentieth century. There have also been profound changes over this period in its social composition. Even before abolition, Brazil had the largest free black population in the Americas. Like all European settlement colonies there were wars against Amerindians but many of these Indian groups survived to the present day. Brazil was one of the few American countries to integrate millions of European immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and has been unusual in effectively acculturating Amerindians, Africans, Europeans and Asians into a coherent society which is increasingly self-identifying as a brown nation.

Brazil was one of the earliest American countries to create a modern welfare system. Despite having only established a modern university in the 1930s, much later than in the rest of Latin America, it has since established a modern world ranking university system which is considered the best in Latin America. From being a predominantly rural society today, it is one of the most urbanized in the world. For all its profound economic inequality, Brazil has also experienced very rapid social mobility as well as a massive reduction of poverty in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Despite still being the largest Catholic country in the world today, it has also seen the increasing secularization of society along with the emergence of numerous Brazilian based Christian and Pentecostal churches. It is now the world's largest Pentecostal nation, and is considered the world's second largest Christian country. It has one of America's most powerful environmental movements which supported the creation of one of the most modern legal systems for the protection of the environment. At the same time, recent governments have been indifferent to Amazonian destruction which has become a world concern.

But in many ways Brazil was a late developer among the South American nations. It was only quite late in the twentieth century that it finally provided universal free primary education; it was also one of the last to go through the demographic transition which accounts for its extraordinary high natural growth in the late twentieth century. But since 1960, Brazil has experienced a demographic transition which has brought down birth rates dramatically, and since the turn of the century it has provided universal education for all with women finally outpacing men in years of education. This has led to their increasing participation in the labor force and has led to profound changes in the role of women, and the nature of families in the society. Yet Brazil still suffers from profound inequality, with one of the worst distributions of wages and wealth in the world despite all the mobility, universality of education and urbanization that has occurred. At the same time in the past few decades its economic growth has slowed and has been below that of the other rapidly advancing middle-income countries.

These are the themes we will explore in this general history. In carrying out this synthesis we have had the support and assistance of Matiko Kume Vidal and Judith Heiser Schiffner. Bruno Oliva assisted with our maps and preparing our data files. In turn conversations with Simon Schwartzman, William Summerhill, Boris Fausto, Stuart Schwartz, Edmar Bach, Flavio Versiani, Carlos Antônio Luque, Simão Silber, Sonia Rocha, and Roberto Zagha have helped us refine our arguments and challenged our assumptions.