

Books Reviewed

Levine, Robert M. *The History of Brazil*. Westport, NY: Greenwood, 1999. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. xviii + 280 pp.

Even those unfamiliar with Robert Levine's extensive work on Brazil and Latin America will recognize, upon reading *The History of Brazil*, how much expertise and knowledge the author brings to this topic. One of the distinctive and compelling aspects of this new work is that, unlike many previous histories of this diverse and complex country, Levine manages to cover a vast terrain—from the colonization of Brazil in the 16th century to the nation's expansions in the world economy at the end of the 20th century—in a concise and easy to read two hundred pages. More remarkable is that within these pages (which include limited glossaries of terms and people, index and bibliographic essay) Levine not only hits the key points (and lesser known ones) in the social, economic and political development of Brazil, but manages to weave throughout a sensitive and enlightened discussion. Though at times the prose and organization feel clumsy, this does not detract from the usefulness of this comprehensive book. For those readers previously unfamiliar with Brazil, this is an excellent introduction. For those already well versed in the literature, this is a good resource and teaching tool. Furthermore, for any reader, the work raises pressing social questions about global market economy and wealth distribution in the 21st century.

The History of Brazil is part of The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations series (editors Frank W. Thackeray and John E. Findling) the goal of which is to elucidate, through "up-to-date, concise and analytical histories," the interdependency of nations in the modern world. Using a comparative lens that encompasses Brazil's relations to other countries of Latin America as well as its historical and current connections to Europe, North America and Africa, Levine illuminates Brazil's unique mix of cultures, peoples and ecosystems. Though this abundance and diversity may suggest Brazil to be an "earthly paradise," Levine is quick to expose the country's social and economic disparities. The most salient theme of the work is the enormous gap between the haves and have-nots in Brazil. Claiming nearly half the landmass of South America, which makes it the largest country of the continent and the fifth largest nation in the world, Brazil's natural resources have generated immense wealth. Within the rigid hierarchy of Brazil's social system, however, this wealth is confined to the small upper echelon of society: 60 percent of the nation's wealth is owned by 20 percent of the population. Though in recent years certain marginalized segments of the population, such as street children and indigenous groups, have received world attention, sympathy, and capital, the majority of people living in poverty go unchampioned. Levine demonstrates how patterns of class and racial discrimination and inequity were established and perpetuated throughout Brazil's history and cautions that the country's current embrace of free market economics has in many ways increased rather than diminished the gap.

Proceeding from a general overview of geography, social, political and economic systems, people and culture in Chapter One, the book unfolds chronologically with chapters on colonial Brazil (1500-1822), independence and the Empire (1822 – 1889), the republic (1889-1930) the Vargas Era (1930 – 1954), and the military dictatorship and democracy (1954 – 1998). The final two chapters focus on current political attitudes, citizenship, human rights violations, the women's and environmental movements, tourism and emigration. The book's forte is political economy to the exclusion of any real discussion of culture outside of cursory references to religion, carnival, capoeira, the modernist art movement, music and political cinema. These are all topics of extensive

scholarly studies few of which, unfortunately, make it into the bibliographic essay. For those interested some suggested authors are Robert Stam on cinema, Barbara Browning on dance, Charles Perrone, Christopher Dunn, Chris McGowan and Ricardo Pessanha on music, Diane Brown on Umbanda, Jim Wafer and Ruth Landes on Candomblé, John Lowell Lewis on capoeira, Daniel Linger on carnival, and Richard Parker and Don Kulick on sex and gender.

Apparent throughout the reading is the deep concern the author holds for Brazil and its people. The picture Levine paints of the nation's current social and economic realities is grim, summed up in a quote from president Fernando Henrique Cardoso that "Brazil is no longer an underdeveloped country, but it is an unjust country." Yet there is a glimmer of optimism in the final paragraph which ends with Brazilian anthropologist Roberto DaMatta's reminder of the generosity, wisdom and unfailing hope of the Brazilian people, characteristics that, Levine suggests, will help bring about the changes Brazil so urgently needs.

Katya Wesolowski
Teachers College, Columbia University

Baronov, David. *The Abolition of Slavery in Brazil: The "Liberation" of Africans through the Emancipation of Capital*. Contributions in Latin American Studies, 17. Westport, CN: Greenwood, 2000. Bibliography. Index. 236 pp.

Labor's place in capitalism is the subject of David Baronov's book. He argues, first of all, that political economists—Smith, Ricardo, and Marx—and present-day labor historians have all tended to focus exclusively and mistakenly on wage-labor. Such a focus has leant their work a teleological quality that suggests that all labor systems will "develop" into a wage-labor one. Using a World Systems approach, Baronov makes the case that coerced labor, whether in serfdom or slavery, was an integral part of the capitalist system and that to understand capitalism one must understand the full range of labor systems it utilizes, both in the core and in the periphery. To do so is all the more important since non-wage-laborers have been far more numerous than those usually studied by labor historians.

Secondly, Baronov questions whether the legal abolition of slavery made former slaves into wage workers, and points out the many non-market constraints upon them that prevented that from happening. To back up his argument, he examines the process and immediate result of slavery's abolition in Brazil, and asserts, first, that the end of slavery (and even the slave trade) had long been foreseen by Brazilian elites and, therefore, carefully planned for. He then points to legislation calling for harsh labor contracts for the non-slave workers that date from as early as 1830, notes how free blacks were systematically marginalized, and describes official efforts in the 1880s and 1890s to flood the country with European agricultural workers who would compete with the newly freed slaves. Such efforts to foster racial division, he says, successfully divided workers and kept all of them from asserting their rights. One must ask at this point, however, why, if the whole intent was to maintain coerced labor, slavery was abolished at all. (Indeed, it remains unclear how racialized slavery—as against the enslavement of anyone—ever served the interests of capitalism.)

Brazilianists will regret that less than half the book is about Brazil. But Professor Baronov, who teaches sociology at St. John Fisher College, is more concerned with constructing theory and elaborating a broad generalization about the nature of capitalism

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