

Brazil: An Historical Overview

Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- identify the major epochs in Brazilian history.
 - analyze a timeline to determine the significant turning points in Brazilian history.
 - hypothesize about the major issues facing Brazil at various points in its history.
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Materials

- Student Handout: **Brazil: An Historical Overview**
 - Student Handout: **A Timeline of Brazilian History**
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Activities

1. Divide the class into small workgroups.
 - a. Distribute copies of the student handouts entitled **A Timeline of Brazilian History** to each group and **Brazil: An Historical Overview** to each student.
 - b. Direct students to work in their groups and to utilize the information in the handout **Brazil: An Historical Overview** to fill in the information on the timeline.
 - c. Circulate among the groups and provide guidance and support as needed.
 2. When all of the groups have completed the timeline, explain that the class is going to utilize the information they have gleaned from the handout to describe the evolution of Brazilian history.
 - a. Ask students to identify the events they placed on the timeline for the dates 1494 – 1600.
 - b. Ask students to summarize, in their own words, what appears to be happening in Brazil during this time period.
 - c. To relate it to American history, place the dates 1607 and 1620 on the chalkboard and ask the class if they can identify what was happening in North America in this time period. (Founding of Jamestown and the Plymouth colony, respectively.)
 - d. Ask students to compare the patterns of colonization. What appears to be similar? What appears to be different?
 - e. Ask students to identify the events they placed on the timeline for the years 1630 and 1654.
 - f. Ask students to summarize what appears to be happening in Brazil during this time period.
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**Activities
(continued)**

- g. Ask the class to focus on the event(s) listed in their timeline for 1695.
 - h. How did the discovery of gold change the dynamic of colonization? Is there anything similar in American history?
3. Ask students to identify the events they placed on the timeline for the period 1788 – 1889.
 - a. Direct students to focus on the event of 1788. What prompted this movement? Is it similar to anything American history? How? Why?
 - b. Direct students to examine the period from 1822 to 1889 as described in the handout. What issue appeared to consume both Dom Pedro I and Dom Pedro II? How did they deal with issue of slavery? What was happening in the United States at the same time?
 4. Ask students to identify the events they placed on the timeline for the dates 1917 and 1930.
 - a. Direct students to examine the section of the handout entitled “The Republic.”
 - b. Ask students to compare what was happening in Brazil to what was happening in the United States in the same time period. What are the similarities? What are the differences?
 - c. Does Brazil appear to be stable or unstable at this particular time in its history? Why?
 5. Ask students to identify the events they placed on the timeline for the period 1937 – 1954.
 - a. Ask students to summarize, in their own words, what appears to be happening in Brazil during this time period.
 - b. Does Brazil appear to be stable or unstable at this particular time in its history? Why?
 6. Ask students to identify the events they placed on the timeline for the period 1960 – 2006.
 - a. Ask students to summarize, in their own words, what appears to be happening in Brazil during this time period.
 - b. Does Brazil appear to be stable or unstable from 1960 – 1994? Why?
 - c. Ask students how they would summarize the current state of Brazil from 1994 – 2006. Does it appear to have achieved a degree of stability? Why or why not?
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Brazil: An Historical Overview

Beginnings



In the fifteenth century, Portugal utilized new navigation techniques to sail their caravels in search of a water route to the Far East. Their major competitor was Spain, and Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of the Americas added a new dimension to this competition. In 1494 Spain and Portugal agreed to the Treaty of Tordesillas, dividing the uncharted new lands along an imaginary north-south line. This treaty placed what is now Brazil in the Portuguese sphere. In 1500, an expedition led by Pedro Alvares Cabral arrived on April 22 and formally claimed the land of Brazil for the King of Portugal.

The new land received its name, *Brasil* (Brazil), from a red dyewood, *pau-brasil*, which flourished in this new land. Portugal, however, was more interested in pursuing a water route around Africa in order to reach the Indies. It was not until 1532, in São Vicente, that the first permanent settlement in Brazil was made.

To strengthen and consolidate Portuguese control, King João II (John II) instituted a system of twelve "captaincies" in 1533. However, only those in Pernambuco and São Vicente prospered. In 1549, all the captaincies were united under the rule of one captain-general – Tomé de Souza. By 1600, Brazil was an established and prosperous colony, with functioning captaincies, and an estimated population of 100,000 people, one-third white and two-thirds black, mestizo, and Indian.

The Dutch



In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, other European powers sought to gain a foothold in Brazil. The Dutch were the most successful challengers, and they succeeded in occupying the *Nordeste* (Northeast) in 1630. In this time period, Recife, in Pernambuco, became a cosmopolitan city under Count Maurits of Nassau-Siegen. In addition to bridges, canals, and a botanical garden, the Dutch introduced Protestantism, and Jewish members of the Dutch community established the first Jewish synagogue in the Americas. The Dutch were not driven out until 1654.

Moving Inland



In the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Brazilian population was still clustered around the east coast. The interior was very sparsely populated. Although some settlers had begun moving inland, it was not until gold was discovered in Minas Gerais in 1695, and diamonds about thirty years later, that that inland population began to boom. "Gold fever" brought miners from all over Brazil and Portugal. Some sugar planters abandoned their fields, closed their houses, and took their slaves to the mines. New cities mushroomed in the process.

The most effective group in pushing Brazil's frontiers to the west were the *bandeirantes*. Traveling in groups of anywhere from fifty to several thousand, they explored the interior in their quest for gold, precious stones, and Indians to be used as slaves. Although their activities were often violent and cruel, these pioneers pushed Brazil's frontier beyond the Tordesillas line and added thousands of square miles to Portuguese territory. São Paulo became the main center of these *bandeira* expeditions.

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The Brazilian Monarchy

From the seventeenth century through the beginnings of the nineteenth century, Portugal derived great wealth from Brazil. Following the mercantilist practices of the times, Portugal monopolized Brazilian trade and imposed taxes and restrictions upon its people. No manufacturing was allowed outside of the simplest home industries. There were no independent printing presses, journals, or newspapers. These harsh demands led to a Brazilian independence movement in 1788 led by José da Silva Xavier, but it proved to be unsuccessful.

When Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Portugal in 1807, the Portuguese royal family fled to Brazil, and Rio de Janeiro became the temporary capital of the Portuguese empire. Following the defeat of Napoleon, King João VI and his court returned to Portugal, leaving his son Pedro to rule Brazil. When Portugal attempted to exercise direct control over Brazilian affairs, Pedro declared Brazil's independence on September 7, 1822. On the banks of the Ipiranga River, he unsheathed his sword, and declared "Independence or death!" He was later crowned Emperor of Brazil.



Dom Pedro's reign (1822 – 1831) was characterized by domestic turmoil, including a growing debate over slavery which Dom Pedro viewed as a "cancer that is gnawing away at Brazil." Beset with numerous problems, Dom Pedro abdicated his throne in 1831 in favor of his five year old son, who became Dom Pedro II.

From 1831 to 1840, the country was ruled by three appointed regents, in the young Emperor's name. This was a period of turmoil and decentralization as local factions struggled to gain control of their provinces. Dom Pedro II assumed fully authority in 1840, at the age of 15. During his nearly fifty year reign, Brazil enjoyed a period of great progress. Railroads, ports, and canals were built, immigration was encouraged, and investments in industry and commerce were expanded. His slogan was "*União e Indústria*" (Union and Industry).

Although the long and costly War of the Triple Alliance in which Brazil joined Uruguay and Argentina against Paraguay (1865 – 1870) undermined Dom Pedro's popularity somewhat, it was his uncompromising stand against slavery that eventually brought the empire to an end. On May 13, 1888, Dom Pedro II issued a proclamation freeing all the slaves in Brazil. This caused resentment among many of the *fazendeiros*, or plantation owners. Joining with those forces demanding more regional autonomy, they conducted a coup d'état on November 15, 1889, and a new federalist, republican government in Brazil.

The Republic



The first few years of the republic were stormy, but the country eventually settled down to an era of peaceful development by 1894. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Amazon Valley was producing nearly nine tenths of the world's rubber, and São Paulo and other areas were producing three-fourths of the world's coffee.

International instability had an impact on Brazil in this time period. World War I began in 1914, and in October, 1917, after repeated sinking of Brazilian ships by German u-boats, Brazil entered the war and joined the Allied Powers. After the war, however, Brazil encountered economic crises and political unrest. It also experienced the impact of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

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The Vargas Regime



Amidst the country's political and social unrest, a bloodless coup d'état by a military junta placed Getúlio Vargas, the governor of Rio Grande do Sul, in the office of president and brought an effective end to the republic. Vargas was a wealthy pro-industrial nationalist and anti-communist who favored capitalist development and liberal reforms, but opposition to his policies within Brazil led to a centralized state along Fascist lines. In November 1937, Vargas ended the constitutional, elected government and replaced it with the dictatorial *Estado Novo*, accompanied by street parades of the fascist-like, green shirted *Integralistas*.

Nevertheless, Vargas instituted programs that developed Brazil's mineral resources, improved trade, and improved the living conditions of its citizens. Brazil joined the Allied Powers against the Axis Powers in World War II on August 22, 1942, and it was the only South American country to send combat troops to Europe.

Following the war, Vargas began to liberalize the Brazilian system, but he was compelled to resign in 1945. He was returned to office through the free and fair elections and served as president from 1951 – 1954. Vargas pursued a nationalist policy; turning to the country's natural resources and away from foreign dependency. As part of this policy, he founded *Petrobrás* (the Brazilian oil company). However, amidst accusations of corruption, an attempted assassination attempt against his chief rival, and an ultimatum from the military demanding his resignation, Vargas committed suicide in 1954.

Contemporary Brazil

In 1960, a new federal capital is established in Brasília. However, instability emerged again as the military conducted a coup in 1964 to overthrow the leftist government of João Goulart. From 1964 to 1985, all of Brazil's presidents came from the military. It was not until 1985 that a civilian was selected to the presidency. However, this was also the era of the "economic miracle" as Brazil became Latin America's leading industrial power.

Brazil completed its transition to a popularly elected government in 1989, when Fernando Collor de Mello won 53% of the vote in the first direct presidential election in 29 years. However, a major corruption scandal in 1992 led to his impeachment and ultimate resignation. In the October 1994 presidential elections, Fernando Henrique Cardoso was elected President with 54% of the vote. Cardoso took office January 1, 1995, and pursued a program of ambitious economic reform. He was re-elected in October 1998 for a second four-year term.



Lula

The current president, Luiz Inácio da Silva, commonly known as Lula, was elected president in 2002, after his fourth campaign for the office. He was re-elected in 2006. President Lula, a former union leader, is Brazil's first working-class president. He has placed social programs at the top of his agenda during his campaign and since his election.

A Timeline of Brazilian History

1494	
1500	
1533	
1549	
1600	
1630	
1654	
1695	
1788	
1807	
1822	
1831	
1865 – 1870	
1888	

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1889	
1917	
1930	
1937	
1942	
1945	
1951	
1954	
1960	
1964	
1989	
1992	
1994	
2002	
2006	