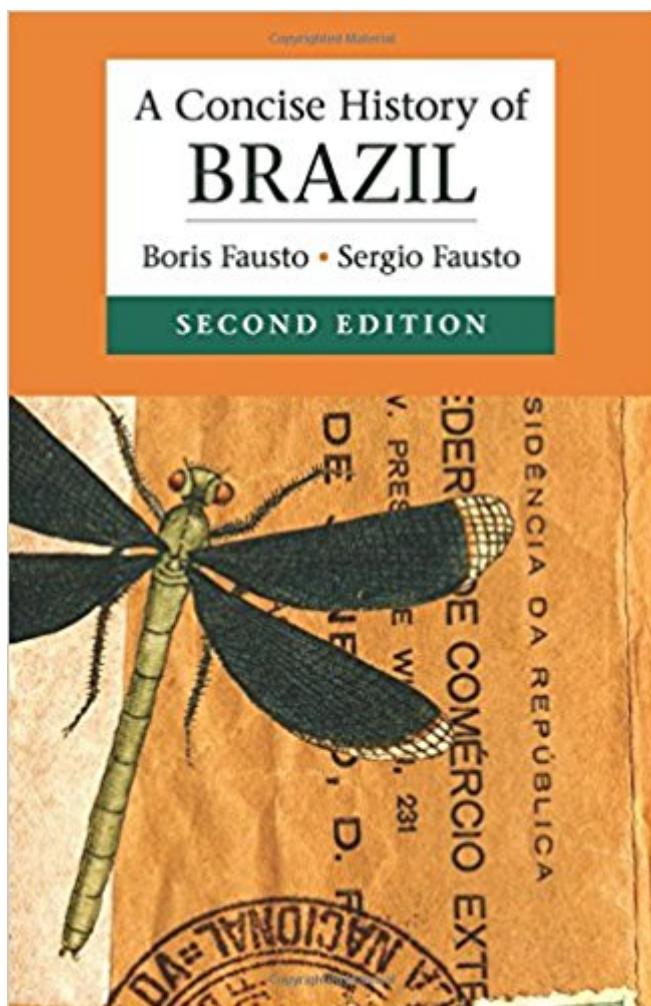


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A Concise History Of Brazil (Cambridge Concise Histories)



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

The second edition of *A Concise History of Brazil* features a new chapter that covers the critical time period from 1990 to the present, focusing on Brazil's increasing global economic importance as well as its continued democratic development.

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.

While this was an uneven read for me, a non-Brazilian, I did get a clearer picture of Brazil's colonial past, which was the topic of most interest to me. A few surprises caught my eye: like the founding of

the Atlantic coastal islands occurring prior to the discovery of Brazil proper; Brazil's relative autonomy from Lisbon throughout the colonial period; and Brazil's closeness to the Dutch both before and after the war with it -- as well as the deep and continuous ties and even economic dependence on Britain throughout the colonial period and beyond. Here is my brief summary of what I learned about that period: The 1382 "Lisbon Revolt" occurred around the same time as Moslems choked-off European trade routes. The revolt stabilized the Portuguese monarchy and allowed them to take the lead in the European search for new unrestricted trade routes. Star-fixed navigation and the lighter, faster Caravelle, gave Portugal an edge in seafaring. Portuguese exploration went as far as Japan and China, proving religious authorities wrong about the shape and nature of the boundaries of the known world. Gold, needed for Lisbon's dwindling national treasury; and spices, to disguise the taste of unrefrigerated meats, were the original bounties. The import of slaves, first used as house servants and urban workers, but later as field hands, began around 1441. Only trace amounts of gold dust was ever found. And even though Portugal had conquered a small region of West Africa by 1415, it took another 53 years to explore and set up trading posts along Africa's Atlantic coast. There, Portuguese, Italians and Genoese Jews, were the first to experiment with a little known formula for turning cane into sugar. The costal islands were used as a laboratory for testing whether, using the formula, sugar could be efficiently produced using slave labor. With a rich supply of slaves in nearby Africa, the Atlantic coastal islands were the first to prove that it could be done successfully. However, once sugar production moved to Brazil, its success was short-lived. And, as production faltered, slaves were then sold out right to Caribbean and North America planters, where larger and more profitable sugar plantations continued to thrive. In fact, it was this success that began the triangular trade in slaves, rum and sugar. Brazil as a country, began as a series of coastal trading posts set up to barter with interior natives for timber from the Brazil tree, thus its name. The treaty of Tordesillas bisected the known world into halves as a way of settling disputes between Spain and Portugal over possession rights over Brazil. All lands were considered owned by the Portuguese Crown, and was divided into large plots awarded temporarily to select friends of the Crown. For years, these "captains," could exploit, but not own, the land. But in order to be sustainable, these plots required constant infusions of cheap labor. And as Indians died in epidemic proportions from European diseases, resisted enslavement, fled from the backbreaking plantation labor in the hot sun, and were killed by the Christian Portuguese for practicing cannibalism, African slaves proved to be the more cost-effective alternative: Africans knew metal work, how to raise cattle, were much less affected by the climate, and because of tribal and language differences, were less able to organize for resistance. Despite this preference, the

Catholic church, while enacting laws against enslaving Indians, believed Africans to be subhuman and thus not only condoned African slavery, but also became slave traders and owners of African slaves itself. Colonial society was centered on large country estates, and was segregated according to perceived bloodlines and color-coded racial distinctions. At the top were wealthy land-owning white Portuguese transplants, often of noble lineage, and merchants engaged in foreign commerce. Then came land-owning white creoles born in the colony, who ruled the colony in a feudalistic way. They were followed by the New crypto-Christians, or forced Jewish converts -- much hated and distrusted because they remained closet Jews, were usually wealthy and ran many of the colony's banks, corporations, and lending institutions. After the conversos, came other lighter-skinned people of mixed blood, followed by darker skins of mixed blood. And finally, came Africans. While laws protected Indians from slavery, slavery still was a national institution. Everyone, from small farmers, to big land owners owned slaves. And while as many as 40% of Indians and Africans were considered free, freedom for slaves was always contested terrain. Also, the relationship between state and colony waxed and waned. But wherever the state was weak or vacillated, the land-owning fiefdom moved in to exercise their autonomy, which remained considerable throughout the colonial period. With Salvador as its Capitol, the North dominated commerce up until 1763. Sugar was the nucleus of economic activity, and as the Spanish and Portuguese monarchies merged, the global fight over control of the sugar business and the slave trade heated up, causing tensions that ended in the 1624 Dutch invasion of Brazil. By 1637 the Dutch controlled a large swath of Brazilian territory. However, by 1654 they were ejected, and by the end of the colonial period, Brazil's borders took on the form it still has today -- with 70% of Brazilians living on the coastal rim, and an unknown number of Indians living in unexplored interior regions. After defeating Portugal in Bahia, with little fanfare, Brazil declared its independence in 1823. It had evolved almost autonomously from Portugal, but still retained deep financial ties to it, to Britain and the Netherlands. Uruguay immediately sued for its independence from Brazil, and a series of internal wars ensued for a decade after independence. But on the whole Brazil maintained its territorial integrity and unity, becoming the only monarchy in South America. Three stars

Superlative. Written with clarity and passion, a comprehensive political history of a complex nation. Ideally the Faustos would have covered the cultural aspects of Brazilian history (i.e., literature and music, particularly re women's roles and Afro-Brazilian life in this surprisingly conservative and patriarchal country), but that would entail a much longer book. Highly recommended.

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