Activist Biology
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Brazil declared its independence from Portugal in 1822 but maintained the monarchy, under the rule of the Bragança dynasty. Slavery lasted until 1888. On November 15, 1889, members of the army established the republic. The Constitution of 1891 stipulated that the new republican state would be democratic, presidentialist, federalist, and secular. The military dominated the first two presidential administrations, but as of 1894, civilian political groups held sway. State oligarchies with ties to commodity production, especially coffee, relied on election fraud to control the presidency and Congress. Because illiterate persons were denied the right to vote, much of the population was excluded from formal political life, and social inequality remained strong. Although this period of Brazilian history is often viewed negatively—and pejoratively called the Old Republic—it was also a time of industrialization, urban growth, immigration, the formation of a working class and labor movement, the rise of cultural and intellectual movements, and the firm demarcation of the nation's borders.
REVOLUTION OF 1930

1930

This armed movement began on October 3, 1930, when discontented dissident oligarchs joined forces with pockets of the middle classes and with young army officers (the latter known as tenentismo). All were critical of what they saw as the excessive liberalism of the First Republic, corrupt elections, and the government’s weak response to the country’s problems. Victorious on November 3, 1930, the movement carried Getúlio Vargas into power and put in place a nationalist, centralizing, and interventionist state. It was a watershed in the history of the Brazilian republic, inaugurating economic nationalism under the strong arm of the state. Historians have long debated whether the movement should in fact be labeled a “revolution.” Some contend it was just the opposite: a strategic rearrangement by the ruling elites meant to contain the leftist revolutionary proposals espoused both by anarchist unions, since the 1910s, and by the Brazilian Communist Party, founded in 1922.

PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

1930–1934

Under the Provisional Government, Vargas ruled by so-called decree-laws. The new government comprised a number of groups, with young army officers predominating. The latter advocated a strong, centralized government, statism, economic diversification, infrastructure development, and the enactment of new health and education policies, while they also wanted social rights to remain under state control. In order to facilitate implementation of these measures, elections to the Constituent Assembly were postponed. Significant changes took place from 1930 to 1934: the enactment of labor laws, public education reform, the creation of both electoral and labor tribunals, passage of the secret ballot, and granting women the right to vote. The government also decreed a number of codes in regard to nature and territory, like the Game and Fish Code, Forest Code, Mine Code, Water Code, and Animal
Protection Code. The constitution was finally enacted on July 16, 1934, and Congress elected Vargas president. New, direct elections were slated to take place in 1938, when Vargas would not be eligible to run again. The fact that conservative Catholic groups had been gaining ground was embedded in the preamble to the new constitution, which invoked the name of God, countering the lay nature of the Brazilian state as established following the Proclamation of the Republic.

**CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT**

1934–1937

When Vargas took office as president, he was unhappy about the new constitution, which limited his powers, which until then had been wholly discretionary. To stand strong against the political class, he forged tight bonds with the army’s high command. In a complex political situation, social conflicts and right- and left-wing political radicalism made inroads. In 1935, a number of political sectors joined forces to fight fascism and imperialism by founding the National Liberation Alliance, drawing thousands of supporters across the country. That same year saw a wave of strikes, and these, plus the alleged Communist threat, were invoked to justify enactment by decree of the National Security Law, which abolished democratic guarantees and defined crimes against the state. Escalating political clashes and a climate of anticommunist paranoia culminated in the November 1937 military coup. With the support of the high command of the armed forces, Vargas shut down Congress and transformed his presidency into a dictatorship.

**ESTADO NOVO**

1937–1945

In 1937, Getúlio Vargas enacted an authoritarian, centralizing constitution that placed great power in the hands of the head of the executive branch. Government intervention in the economy was the order of the day, aimed at fostering development and
Vargas intended to shape a new nation and regenerate the lives of Brazilians. In 1939, he founded the Press and Propaganda Department, an agency that engaged in intense, systematic political propaganda through all media and was also responsible for censoring any cultural or intellectual expression against the regime. The Estado Novo was critical of Brazil’s liberal democratic past, which it associated with the corruption characteristic of the early years of the republic. In April 1942, the country joined the fight against the Axis alliance, acting in blatant contrast to the authoritarian, corporatist nature of the Vargas regime. When World War II ended, the victory of liberal democracy in the West shook the foundations of the Estado Novo. On October 29, 1945, Vargas was deposed by the army. Since there was no vice president, the Federal Supreme Court held power until elections took place.