

CORE-UA 555—Cultures & Context: Brazil (Fall 2021)

TuTh 11:00-12:15, 19 UP, Room 102

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Office Hours: Tu 2:00-4:00, Wed 10-12

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“Brazil is the country of the future, and always will be.” This ironic observation—expressed by Brazilians and foreigners alike—neatly encapsulates the gap between predictions of Brazil’s rise to great power status and its continuing struggles with social and racial inequalities, economic instability, and political corruption. In a more subtle fashion, it also alludes to the tension between the drive for economic development and (westernized) cultural modernity, on the one hand, and the enduring embrace of non-European aspects of Brazilian culture and tradition, on the other. This tension has deeply informed the way Brazilian scholars and scholars of Brazil view its history and culture.

During the first 12 years of this century, Brazil, which then had the world’s eighth largest economy, seemed to be on the verge of joining the community of rich and powerful nations, and was even making significant progress in reducing income inequality and racial discrimination. It seemed like “the future” had finally arrived. But recent developments in Brazil have demonstrated how quickly conventional wisdom about a nation’s “character” or “destiny” can shift, and shift again. Over the last eight years, Brazilians have witnessed a severe slump in their economy, the revelation of massive corruption schemes, major public health crises caused first by the Zika virus (remember that?) and then Covid 19, the incineration of priceless collections in its National Museum and Cinemateca by entirely preventable fires, the impeachment and removal of a democratically-elected president on questionable charges, ongoing economic recession, and then the catastrophic election of a far-right politician to the presidency whose leadership in the face of the pandemic one global public health expert has described as “wretched.” He has also overseen the worst period of environmental destruction in the Amazon in recorded history. By every conceivable measure, things have not been going so well for Brazil lately.

The geopolitical entity known as Brazil began life as an overseas colony of a European empire, and as is the case with most nations that emerged from colonial rule, there has been a simultaneous emphasis on the formation of a distinct “national culture” and on the need to forge a recognizably “modern nation,” in both the political and economic sense. This course will focus on postcolonial Brazil, which refers not just to the period following independence, but also to the many ways in which the colonial experience, including the massive displacement and enslavement of indigenous and African peoples, has shaped Brazilian society and culture and Brazil’s place in the global order. The course will also focus on three principal locales: Rio de Janeiro (the major focus), São Paulo, and Salvador da Bahia. Because Brazil, like the US, Russia, and China, is a nearly continental nation, it would be virtually impossible to cover every segment of its national territory, but these three very different cities, and the regions in which they are situated, will allow us to appreciate the diversity of Brazilian society and culture, and the range of historical experiences that have produced them.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There will be a midterm and a final exam, both consisting mainly of essays. Course requirements also include one brief (5-page) analytical paper, based on a recommended film, as well as two very short (2- to 3-page) response papers on assigned readings. Prompts elaborating on the paper assignments will be posted under Assignments in the main Brightspace site. In addition to these paper assignments, all students will be expected to attend and participate in recitation sections, where attendance will be recorded. **In preparation for the section meetings, you will be required to post at least one question or comment on the NYU Classes Forum site for your section about the weekly reading assignment, including the document(s).** In the calculation of final grades, we will assign the following (approximate) weights to the required assignments: Final exam—25%, Midterm exam—20%, Longer paper—15%, Two short papers (combined)—15%, Class participation—25%.

Plagiarism, including borrowing from the internet or the work of others without attribution, will be grounds for a failing grade and will be reported to university authorities. NYU's policies on academic integrity can be found at <https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html>

If you have any sort of disability that may affect your ability to carry out assigned course work, I urge you to contact the staff in the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980) to explore what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. Information and documentation of disability will be kept confidential. The website is <https://www.nyu.edu/about/leadership-university-administration/office-of-the-president/office-of-the-provost/university-life/office-of-studentaffairs/student-health-center/moses-center-for-student-accessibility.html>

Students are encouraged to take advantage of the peer tutoring services at the University Learning Center, located in University Hall, 110 E. 14th St. (212-998-8047) and in the Academic Resource Center, 18 Washington Pl. (212-998-8085). The website is www.nyu.edu/students/academic-services/undergraduate-advisement/academic-resource-center/tutoring-and-learning.html

Required readings will include the two novels and the textbook listed below. These are available in hard copy from the NYU Bookstore. For those who cannot access the bookstore, readings will be available through Bobst Library in electronic form or will be scanned and posted on the main Brightspace site under "Resources." The same applies to any supplementary readings: they will either be available as sections of e-journals or e-books accessible through Bobcat or scanned and posted. If you have any difficulty accessing the readings, please contact me or your recitation section instructor.

Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, *Dom Casmurro* (Oxford U. Press, 1998)

Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star* (2nd ed.)

James N. Green and Thomas E. Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (3rd ed.)

This course (including recitation sections) will be taught in person. To accommodate students who are quarantining or unable to travel, the lectures for the course will be recorded on Zoom but our expectation is that students who are present in the NY area and not in quarantine will attend the lectures in person. The power point for each lecture will be posted on the Brightspace site under Resources after the lecture.

Week 1 (9/2): Where in the World is Brazil? An Introduction

Readings: Green and Skidmore, pp. 1-7, 24-27, 33

Unit I: Building a Free Nation on Slave Foundations**Week 2 (9/7, 9/9): From Imperial Center to Independent Empire**

Readings: Machado de Assis, 3-39 [chaps. 1-18]
Green and Skidmore, pp. 37-38, 45-58

Docs: José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva, “On Slavery,” in 173-5; “From the Journal of Maria Graham,” 176-80, James N. Green et al. *The Brazil Reader* (2nd ed.)

Week 3 (9/14, 9/16): The Second Slavery and the Second Empire

Readings: Green and Skidmore, pp. 59-80
Machado de Assis, pp. 40-97 [chaps. 19-52]

Doc: “Workers for Sale or for Rent,” Daryle Williams, et al, *The Rio Reader*, pp. 112-115
Robert E. Conrad, *Children of God’s Fire*, Docs. 9.6 and 9.7, pp. 381-386 (scanned)

Week 4 (9/21, 9/23): African Cities of the Americas

Readings: Machado de Assis, pp. 98-157 [chaps. 53-89]
João José Reis, *Divining Slavery and Freedom*, pp. 64-74

Doc: “Domingos’ Manumission and Manumissions Granted by Him,” *Divining Slavery and Freedom*, Appendix 2, pp. 313-6.

Week 5 (9/28, 9/30): Ending Slavery and Empire

Readings: Machado de Assis, pp. 157-216 [chaps. 90-127]
Green and Skidmore, pp. 81-105

Doc: “Selections from *Abolitionism*, Joaquim Nabuco,” *The Brazil Reader*, pp. 246-9

Unit II: Modernity in Black and White**Week 6 (10/5, 10/7): The Rise of São Paulo and the First Republic**

Readings: Machado de Assis, pp. 217-44 [chaps. 128-148]
Green and Skidmore, pp. 107-21

Docs: “Revolt of the Whip,” *The Brazil Reader*, pp. 282-4, and “Demands of the São Paulo General Strike of 1917,” *The Brazil Reader*, pp. 295-7

Week 7 (10/14): São Paulo, Modernism, and the Rise of Vargas

Readings: Green and Skidmore, pp. 121-139, 141-162

Docs: Oswald de Andrade, “The Cannibalist Manifesto,” pp. 300-5; Gilberto Freyre, “The Masters and the Slaves,” pp. 330-4, in *The Brazil Reader*

FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE IN RECITATION SECTION MEETING, 10/13

Week 8 (10/19, 10/21): “Black Rome”—Salvador da Bahia

Reading: Anadelia A. Romo, *Brazil’s Living Museum*, pp. 1-12, 133-50

MIDTERM EXAM 10/21

Week 9 (10/26, 10/28): Urban Culture in Rio and the Changing Urban Landscape

Readings: Bryan McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil*, pp. 41-65
Green and Skidmore, pp. 163-85

Docs: “A Fond Farewell to Praça Onze,” *The Rio Reader*, pp. 206-7
“Excerpts from *Child of the Dark*,” *The Brazil Reader*, pp. 391-5

Unit III: From Democracy to Dictatorship and Back Again

Week 10 (11/2, 11/4): Brazil as Populist Republic and Racial Democracy

Readings: Lispector, pp. vi-xiv
Green and Skidmore, pp. 185-96
McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil*, pp. 96-128

Docs: “Vargas’ Suicide Letter,” pp. 380-2; Abdias do Nascimento, “The Myth of Racial Democracy,” pp. 445-8, *The Brazil Reader*

Week 11 (11/9, 11/11): Institutional Acts and Economic Miracles

Readings: Lispector, pp. 1-36
Green and Skidmore, pp. 197-230

Doc: “A Letter to Pope Paul VI,” *The Brazil Reader*, pp. 460-5

Week 12 (11/16, 11/18): Transformations and Transitions

Readings: Lispector, pp. 36-77
Green and Skidmore, pp. 231-247

Docs: “Second-Wave Brazilian Feminism,” pp. 479-80; “LGBT Rights and Democracy,” pp. 481-3, *The Brazil Reader*

SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE IN SECTION, WEDNESDAY, 11/17

Week 13 (11/23): The Marvelous City and the Challenges of Urban Life

Readings: Green and Skidmore, pp. 247-73
The Rio Reader, pp. 304-7, 333-6, 344-56

Unit IV: Whiplash on a National Scale

Week 14 (11/30, 12/2): The Workers’ Party in Power, 2002-2016

Readings: “Lula’s Legacy in Brazil,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 44:2 (2011), pp. 11-12, 19-22, 23-26, 34-37
Green and Skidmore, pp. 273-96

Doc: “The Bolsa Família Program,” pp. 523-5, in *The Brazil Reader*

Week 15 (12/7, 12/9): Corruption, Collapse, and the Resurgence of the Right

Readings: Green and Skidmore, pp. 297-318
“Lula’s Legacy in Brazil,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 44:2 (2011), pp. 31-3
Benjamin A. Cowan, “Holy Ghosts of Brazil’s Past,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 48:4 (2016), pp. 346-352

Doc: “On the Imperative of Transnational Solidarity: A U.S. Black Feminist Statement on the Assassination of Marielle Franco,” *The Black Scholar*, Mar. 23, 2018 (scanned)

LONGER PAPER (FILM ANALYSIS) DUE IN SECTION, 12/8

Week 16 (12/14): Wrap-up and Review for Final Exam

Readings: Green and Skidmore, pp. 319-22
Anakwa Dwamena, “How Jair Bolsonaro and the Coronavirus Put Brazil’s Systemic Racism on Display,” *The New Yorker*, July 9, 2020 (scanned).
<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-jair-bolsonaro-and-the-coronavirus-put-brazils-systemic-racism-on-display>

FINAL EXAM: TUESDAY, 12/21, 12pm-1:50pm