

Introduction

PATRONAGE FORMED THE connecting web of politics in nineteenth-century Brazil and sustained virtually every political act. Electoral victory especially depended on its skillful use. It is my aim here to explore the specific way in which granting protection, official positions, and other favors in exchange for political and personal loyalty worked to benefit especially the interests of the well-to-do. Detailing the nature and mechanisms of patron-client ties can serve not only to expand our understanding of Brazilian political history, but also to clarify the link between social elites and the exercise of power. I suspect it will also help unravel puzzles regarding relationships of authority throughout Latin America and, perhaps, in the Mediterranean world in general. Certainly the techniques through which those who were to be controlled came seemingly to acquiesce in and perhaps sometimes even to approve of the system of their own control are relevant to other periods and other places. More particularly, the meaning and nature of managed elections constitute issues of moment to every Latin Americanist, as do parties that form and reform with seemingly fuzzy programs, the constant search for places and sinecures, and the transactional quality of personal relations within an ostensibly impersonal polity. But since it is only through the actual practice of patronage within particular political institutions that its workings and significance can be truly grasped, I have chosen to focus on Brazil from 1840 to 1889, that is, during the reign of Emperor Pedro II.

Men of property dominated the Brazilian state in the nineteenth century. Contemporaries understood that well, and those who

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wrote about such matters did not, on the whole, consider it a bad thing. Perhaps because some Marxist historians subsequently pointed it out, others have struggled to deny that dominance, either alleging a democratic quality to nineteenth-century Brazil or finding most power to reside in groups other than the landed oligarchy. My intent is not to fill an ideological pigeonhole, but rather to understand how politics seemed to those who practiced it, what those men purposed, and how their anxieties and fears were translated into political action. Preventing social conflicts from erupting into disorder and destroying a way of life that benefited the propertied was a predominant consideration in building the Brazilian political system, as has probably been and still is true elsewhere. In this sense my task is not to make a new point but to explore the details of an old one, tracing how patronage connected to social and economic structures.

Patronage meant both the act of filling government positions and the protection of humble clients, even landless agricultural workers. In this book I show how in nineteenth-century Brazil these two kinds of patronage were entwined through elections. The two levels of patronage—the local and the national—have usually been studied separately, typically by anthropologists on the one hand and political scientists on the other. Historians have generally ignored elections in the villages and towns of nineteenth-century Brazil, dismissing them as unimportant, given that the makeup of Parliament did not depend on them. But if they were unimportant, why did people throughout Brazil, even in its remotest corners, get so excited about them, to the point of risking their lives for the sake of victory at the polls?

I argue that elections tested and displayed the local patron's leadership. Through a two-tiered system of indirect elections, voters chose the locally prominent to form the Electoral Colleges that would, in turn, choose Deputies to Parliament.* The family and the household formed the bedrock of a socially articulated structure of power, and the local leader and his following worked to extend that grid of dependence. In a predominantly rural society, a large landowner expected to receive the loyalty of his free workers, of nearby

* Until Chapter Seven, where the law of 1881 establishing direct elections is discussed, I reserve the word "elector" for a member of the Electoral Colleges.

small farmers, and of village merchants, demonstrated through their support in many ways, not least at the polls. Moreover, a much broader swath of Brazilians participated in elections than has heretofore been acknowledged, thus broadening the number of participants in electoral acts that publicly demonstrated the "natural" superiority of some over others. A challenger to the leadership of a local potentate had to build a following of his own; displaying its size could easily mean using outright force to unseat the formerly dominant chief. So elections and violence went together.

At the national level the result of elections could be foretold almost absolutely, but locally for certain men everything hinged on their outcome. Appointment to official positions helped expand the leader's circle, and this fact impelled him to solicit such appointments from provincial authorities, members of the national Parliament, Cabinet ministers, and even the Prime Minister. To demonstrate his worthiness for such appointment, he had to win elections, so that, in a circular yet real way, he was leader because he won elections and he won because he was leader. The local patron found himself thus enmeshed in a system that made him client to someone else who depended on still others in a series of links reaching all the way to the national capital. For their part Cabinets exercised their authority not against local leaders but through them, and these landed bosses, in turn, sought not to oppose the government but to participate in it. Thus emerges a crucial point in understanding politics in nineteenth-century Brazil that greatly lessens the significance of any hypothetical opposition between private and public power.

This book focuses on the internal politics of Brazil. In this it contrasts with those works, including my own, that have paid primary attention to Brazil's export economy. Although I share Fernando Henrique Cardoso's view that political and class relations within Brazil intimately meshed with the demands of the international economy, I center my attention on politics, not on economics, that is, on the network of patronage rather than on the network of production and exchange. Instead of stressing international dependence, I emphasize how class relations within Brazil created the personal dependence of clients on patrons and thus shaped the nation's domestic politics.¹

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For a long time and to some extent even now, the political history of nineteenth-century Brazil has been treated as the story of Cabinets and Kings, or of parliamentary divisions. Even its best practitioners, beginning with Joaquim Nabuco in 1897 and including Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in 1972, made little effort to understand the internal mechanisms of political action or to relate such action to society.² Most twentieth-century historians, moreover, have looked back on the period nostalgically, using their descriptions of the Empire to criticize—sometimes subtly, sometimes not—Brazil's subsequent republican or dictatorial regimes. In doing so they placed undue emphasis on the figure of Pedro II or, at best, on some of his advisers. In the present book I pay little attention to the particular actions of the Emperor, since he played only a limited part in the day-to-day political practices whose meanings for contemporaries I seek to understand. And many of the qualities of subsequent Brazilian political life that Brazilian and foreign observers have decried characterized the Empire as much as any other period.

Historians have been divided over whether the nineteenth-century Brazilian state served primarily the interests of a ruling class of wealthy land- and slaveowners or whether it possessed a life and purpose entirely its own. The controversy has implications not only for Brazil's present condition but also for the theory of the state. In the 1930s Caio Prado Júnior maintained, as have many historians who followed him, that the only real question in Brazilian history was to determine whether landowners or merchants formed the dominant class; the government would inevitably reflect its wishes. In his book *Evolução política do Brasil*, which originally bore the subtitle *Interpretação dialética da história brasileira*, he argued that Brazil's break with Portugal in 1822 sprang from the desire of the Brazilian landed class to free itself from a colonial metropolis dominated by merchants. Landowners then built a political system they could control, and only when a new, progressive Brazilian bourgeoisie of merchants and bankers challenged their landed power did the system weaken, finally collapsing in 1889, with the overthrow of the Empire.³

I too see the wealthy as using the structures of a government that they themselves created to advance their interests. But I do not see those interests as leading so directly to adopting this or that policy,

tax law, tariff regulation, or labor act, but rather as exerting an influence on concepts of the good and the true, of properly deferential behavior within a hierarchical social structure, of loyalty to one's patrons and care toward one's clients. In short, although there were some issues around which classes coalesced or diverged, I understand interests more often to have been mediated through ideology, an ideology demonstrated and strengthened through political action. Nor do I believe merchants and landowners, as such, clashed with each other, for I find that many were either one and the same person or closely related, and that men divided from each other along other lines. Finally, I do not see the end of the Empire as having been impelled by the rise of a new class with a distinct ideology. Both early- and late-nineteenth-century landowners felt the pull of the capitalistic world economy, and both developed similar seigniorial relationships with their workers and dependents. That is why the search for places of local authority continued to characterize the Republic as it had the Empire.

An alternative historiographical current has stressed cultural factors and the search for status as the determinant of Brazil's political character. Nestor Duarte asserted in 1939, for instance, that power in Brazil always remained within the private sphere of the family, an institution that nurtured a deep hostility toward the state. Even while acknowledging that by family he meant the family of the "big house," that is, the planter family, he refused to focus on economic interests or the way in which government responded to them. For him, "the big house . . . is the best indication of an extra-state social organization that ignores the state, that does without it, and that will struggle against it."⁴ Oliveira Vianna advanced a similar argument, though seen from the other side, in a series of studies that began in the 1920s but had their clearest formulation in 1949. He recognized, as do I, the power of the large landowners over their dependents, and knew that each landowner was allied with others through family ties. But he understood them to be determinedly opposed by a state that sought to restrict their influence, dominate them, discipline them. The introduction of elections and the semblance of democracy, he said, had greatly complicated and retarded this constructive effort, since landowners controlled the votes within their fiefdom.⁵ Readers will find much evidence in the present book of controlled elections and family influence, but I re-

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ject the implied divorce between the state, even the central state, and the landed bosses. And I certainly do not suggest, as he does, that the increased power of an authoritarian state, to be exercised over an otherwise anarchically predestined people, was a goal ardently to be desired. Culture, moreover, is formed and shaped; it is itself a process, not just a given, and in that shaping the interests of some are favored while those of others are eclipsed. In nineteenth-century Brazil culture and tradition bolstered the place of the few, of the propertied. Class and status intertwined.

A more recent and highly influential work by Raymundo Faoro, significantly titled *Os donos do poder* (The Power Holders), argues with much verve and literary power that all Luso-Brazilian history since 1385 can be understood as an effort by a “bureaucratic estate” to gain ascendancy over the rest of society: under Emperor Pedro II, its struggle seemed victorious, since the Conservative Party usually triumphed over the Liberals, who (he said) represented the landowners; the establishment of the Republic in 1889 momentarily reversed the tables and placed the planters in control.⁶ I differ with Faoro on almost every point, but especially regarding the state. I do not see it as autonomous and free from its social and economic context, nor do I believe Brazilian politicians, judges, or other officials represented only the interests of a reified state once they stepped through the portals of a governmental office. Holders of positions at different levels of government often clashed with each other, so that central authorities did indeed sometimes struggle against local power holders, but, at both extremes and throughout the political system, officials responded with special sensitivity to the landed interest, if they were not themselves landowners.

All these approaches impose present-day categories on historical actors that those actors did not necessarily recognize, and yet historians deduce from those categories what the actors intended and give them roles they may not have chosen. In contrast I wish to focus on the meanings they gave to their own actions, considering individuals, whether in or out of government, as whole persons with multiple engagements, sometimes conflicting, sometimes in doubt. What did they understand themselves to be about? Did politicians, for instance, preoccupy themselves primarily with advancing the particular economic interests of landowners and merchants,

or did they principally focus on strengthening the sinews of central power? My conclusion is that they did neither. As revealed through their correspondence, they devoted the great bulk of their energy to building networks of patronage, widening their following, or finding a powerful protector for their political fortunes. Political men in nineteenth-century Brazil were predominantly (albeit not exclusively) concerned with patronage, whether dispensing it or seeking it—often both. In that preoccupation and through the actions that demonstrated it, they in fact legitimized the existing social structure in which men of property stood at the top. Politics indeed worked to that end, but not solely or even principally through the pursuit of particular governmental policies. Rather, that goal was reached through an entire style of life and practice.

Finally, while the ideology of patronage served the interests of the economic elite, it also provided a plumb line against which the behavior of that dominant class could be measured and checked. Its members, therefore, violated the code only gingerly. For that reason this pattern of political behavior could be accepted by more people than one might expect. It was rooted in an ancient social system and ultimately in familial and interpersonal relationships built up over a long time. I do not see it as a stage to be superseded by the inevitable triumph of an impersonal and universalistic “rational” bureaucracy, nor do I examine a pathological condition. Patronage worked for some if not for others, and preserved a structure that only a Revolution could have destroyed.