A Message from the Editor

The São Paulo Experiment

Ryan Alexander, Editor

"Brazil . . . it's the country of the future, and it always will be!" The exact provenance of this old joke is unclear. Typically, it is attributed either to the Austrian writer Stefan Zweig, who wrote of his adopted homeland with admiration in his 1941 book, *Brazil: A Land of the Future*, or to the French statesman Charles de Gaulle, who is widely credited with coining the exact phrase, with its more sarcastic and derisive tone. Regardless, at its origin it reflected an outsider's perspective. Since then, however, it has morphed into a kind of self-deprecating admission by Brazilians that every time their nation finally seems to be on the verge of breaking through, something bad happens.

A quick sweep through Brazil's history can give you the feeling that it has been forever trapped in this boom-bust cycle. In the first half of the nineteenth century, foreign observers praised Brazil's comparatively amicable split from Portugal and subsequent stability as an independent empire, both of which stood in stark contrast to Spanish America's protracted wars of independence and shaky beginnings as a collection of unstable republics. Yet imperial Brazil hung onto chattel slavery longer than anywhere else in the Atlantic system (the decree of abolition finally came in 1888), making it a pariah in the international community while postponing and worsening its inevitable transition into a post-slavery existence. Its coffee-based export economy eventually recovered, but it was again thrown into disarray by the global economic depression of the 1930s. Its subsequent turn toward mass industrialization produced what some heralded as an economic miracle, but once again the bubble burst just as quickly. Populist mass politics, interpreted by well-to-do Brazilians and foreign economic interests as the start of a slippery slope into a communist future, spurred the imposition of a brutal military dictatorship

that lasted from 1964 to 1985, while astronomical foreign debt plunged the country deep into a hyperinflationary economic crisis in the 1980s. The restoration of democracy in that decade appeared to offer a fresh start, but, yet again, reality hasn't quite caught up to hope. While at the turn of the new millennium Brazil was the B in BRIC (which also included Russia, India, and China, and later South Africa, resulting in the expanded BRICS), a group of nations widely regarded as the world's most potent emerging economies, today South America's largest country is rarely discussed in such optimistic terms. Perhaps the most telling statement of Brazil's most recent fall from grace is its current president, Jair Bolsonaro, a crude politician who has publicly defended the military dictatorship's routine use of torture while touting, of all things, his own military record to secure mass support from an electorate looking for a savior.

The details of this history are unique to Brazil, but the general themes—dramatic shifts in economic policy, wild swings in political affairs, constant pivots from inward-looking nationalism to externally oriented integration into global markets—are no doubt familiar to scholars of all areas of the Global South. And one of the salient experiences across all Global South regions in the twentieth century has been mass urbanization. From Jakarta to Kinshasa to Manila, the world's largest cities, and the world's fastest-growing cities, by and large sit in the Global South. Latin America's major urban centers have been no exception, and Brazil's financial and industrial capital, São Paulo, has recently surpassed Mexico City as the region's largest (both sit in the top five of the world's megalopolises in terms of population). São Paulo, less familiar to foreigners than its glitzy counterpart, Rio de Janeiro, is arguably the more influential of Brazil's two megacities. As the introduction to this issue points out, the stereotypes of the two cities could not differ more: Rio, with its attractive art deco facades, sexy samba dancers, pervasive beachgoing culture, and over-the-top carnival celebrations, stands in stark contrast to São Paulo's drab, boxy high-rises, suit-and-tie wearing business class, and seemingly staid culture. These are, of course, gross exaggerations; reality is always more varied and complex than stereotypes. But the stereotypes have power. The authors of this special issue aim to move past them by offering new and innovative lines of analysis.

I do not want to repeat what is in the forthcoming introduction too much. It would be redundant, and I would not do it justice. But, briefly, the eight

authors in this volume frame their analyses around what the guest editors, Aiala Levy of the University of Scranton, Jay Sosa of Bowdoin College, and ethnomusicologist Daniel Gough, call experimental urbanity. Their use of the word *experimental* draws from its twin meanings in Portuguese—to experiment, but also to experience. And the word *urbanity* in this case is meant to suggest a departure from urbanism, which emphasizes the material or structural dimensions of urban life, as well as from urbanization, which focuses on the practical elements that define how cities are established and grow. Rather, the authors here focus on cultural production far more than on political or economic affairs, emphasizing how middle-class urbanites have shaped and reshaped their lives in this sprawling metropolis, and in particular how the sensory experiences of urban life—its aesthetics, its sounds, its crowds—have spurred particular social activities.

Though they are eclectic in theme, the eight articles all revolve around these common goals. Aiala Levy examines cinemagoing in the 1910s as an aspirational activity for a growing middle class interested not only in seeing movies, but in being seen in the right places. Adrian Anagnost interprets the avant-garde architecture and iconoclastic performance art of Flávio de Carvalho as being symbolic of São Paulo's constant cultural upheaval. Marcio Siwi sees the development of the sprawling Ibirapuera Park as both a showpiece of grand ambition and a process fraught with racial and class implications. Reighan Gillam analyzes a massively successful T-shirt design known as "I Africanize São Paulo," extrapolating a great deal about the poorly understood realities of being Black in São Paulo. Leonardo Cardoso explores efforts to pass noise ordinances in São Paulo in response to the construction of a massive expressway and airport as a means of understanding common experiences with one of the unintended inconveniences of urban growth. Daniel Gough gleans crucial insights from a movement advocating financial support for music industry workers about the role that state funding for artistic creation plays in the city's cultural landscape. Joseph Jay Sosa demonstrates that queer protest over the last few years in São Paulo has depended on a careful manipulation of space and geography to maximize its effectiveness. Finally, Marcos Steuernagel shows how a legal clash between celebrity TV-presenter-turned-investor Silvio Santos and legendary theater director Zé Celso over a proposition by Santos to build a series of high-rise luxury apartments points to competing visions of what well-heeled *paulistanos* wanted their city to look like. Together, these

eight pieces give readers a sense of the preoccupations of middle-class residents of São Paulo across the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries.

What I like most about this collection is that it is not really about the Brazil of the future. As the old cliché at the top of this essay would suggest, visions of a better future have consumed Brazilians for a long time, and this is certainly reflected in its history and historiography. Its official capital, after all, is not the economic colossus of São Paulo, nor the cultural magnet of Rio, nor even the faded slave-holding center of Salvador, Bahia (although Rio and Salvador each were at one point), but Brasília, a rather unprepossessing planned city in the interior constructed according to the modernist visions of the architects Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer. Of course, the future figures prominently in this collection, too. Huge highways and airports are built, after all, in anticipation of a future filled with car and air traffic, and sprawling parks are built to preserve green space in a future defined by both urban density and urban sprawl. But this collection really is about the present, at different moments in time. It is about the interplay between individual lives, a collective existence, and the city itself, all three of which are continually made and remade across time in response to change.

A couple of final items worth noting: The term *carioca* means, as a noun, someone from the city of Rio de Janeiro, and as an adjective, something pertaining to Rio. Its counterpart for the city of São Paulo is *paulistano*. Someone from the state of São Paulo is known as a *paulista*, while someone from Rio de Janeiro state is a *fluminense*. You'll also note another peculiarity: Some, but not all, of the authors in this special issue, in keeping with Brazilian historiography, will refer to scholars and historical figures by their first rather than last names. Rest assured that this is not amateurism on the authors' parts, nor editorial laziness on ours. It is, rather, a distinct convention in Lusophone scholarship.

I hope, regardless of your knowledge of Brazil, that you will find this issue as enlightening as I did.