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Brazil: The Troubled Rise of a Global Power by Michael Reid

Chapter 4: From Monarchy to Coffee Republic

During Napoleon Bonaparte's quest in uniting Europe, the monarch of Portugal undesirably got involved (Reid, 54). As the French leader attempted to weaken Britain's economy, he requested that Brazil cut them off from any trade. Consequentially, he threatened to invade. In order to save the monarch, the whole royal party moved to Brazil in just three days. Quickly, the monarch established a capital and all of its necessities as a country (Reid, 55). When Napoleon's threat expired King Joao, although decided to stay in Brazil, eventually was summoned back to Portugal. Declaring himself emperor of Brazil, Joao's son Pedro remained (Reid, 55). Becoming independent, although requiring hard work, Brazil did very well during the coming years. Although the country was so diverse and divided, it managed to gain political and economic stability.

Dom Pedro II became king, abdicated by his father, in 1840. He was a brilliant leader, starting at only fifteen, he ended up holding the throne for fifty years (Reid, 57). During his reign, he dealt with many issues on slavery and a stagnant economy. Pedro II was never a fan of slavery, however, its participants were a dominating force within Brazil's small economy. Eventually, Britain would grant them the title of an independent country, only if Brazil abolished slavery. As the crown attempted to eliminate, slave trade undoubtedly continued underground. Therefore, the British gave permission its Royal navy to seize any slave trade ships. In an extra effort, Brazil set up special maritime courts to put slave traders on trial (Reid, 63). With these combined efforts, slave trade quickly halter. Although, there was still an internal trade for a while, as the country would soon need labor for its new coffee plantations.

With this sudden halt in the trade, Brazil had leftover money which was quickly invested into railroads and coffee plantations. This was a necessary progressive step for the economy because transporting goods was a difficult and high cost project. “Government reports stated that railways would promote industrialization and help agriculture and commerce as well as being a force for national unity and greatness” (Reid, 62). It took a while for railroads to take off because the country simply did not have enough money. Although Brazil had outstanding credit with Britain (they borrowed often because it was more efficient than funds from tax revenue) investors were hesitant due to the uncertainty of railroad profits. However, with the new railroads and coffee plantations, Brazil’s economy took off (Reid, 65). People who had involvement with, and made profit from coffee tended to invest in railroads. This not only aided in product transport, but also attracted European settlers who were needed for work (Reid, 66).

When war weakened the monarchy, it soon came to an end. The southern border of Brazil has been an issue to the country for a long time (Reid, 66). Due to a cattle export tax to Rio Grande do Sul by Uruguay, Brazil invaded. In turn it was invaded by Paraguay. Eventually, Brazil and Argentina were against Paraguay (Reid, 67). Although this dreadful war weakened the monarchy, it strengthened the army power of Brazil. Dom Pedro got sick, was exiled, and died a few years later. His exile came from upcoming political parties who could not wait for his death in order to take office (Reid, 68).

The monarchy unified Brazil and established the standard of representative and constitutional government. It also, over time, created nationalism and political stability within Brazil (Reid, 68). Although Dom Pedro is seen as an outstanding leader, there were still some major flaws across the board, as is with any leader in history. Brazil continued to be racist and it had no land laws, two major equality issues among its people. The monarchy was no longer

popular: Dom Pedro's successor, his daughter, was not well admired by Brazilians. Also, the country felt as though the centralized government was impeding on its progress as a nation (Reid, 69).