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Chapter 4 Summary

From Monarchy to Coffee Republic

Chapter 4 discusses how Brazil became an independent nation, as well as what happened afterwards. The independence of the country was easy to obtain, as a bloody revolution was occurring in Portugal, not Brazil. Although Americans view independence as a way to break away from their paternal nation and set up an entirely new government, Brazilians saw it as a way to continue owning slaves. Once achieving their independence, it took the Brazilians over a century to develop into the system of government it has today. Throughout this chapter, Reid highlighted the difficulties of the different forms of national government in Brazil, ending with the election of dictator Getulio Vargas in 1930.

After Brazil gained its independence from Portugal, it was still held down by Portuguese influences with the rule of Pedro II, son of the previous king. As he ruled, the conservatives and liberals of the country grew uneasy when it came to developing a formal government for their nation. While conservatives hoped for a big government that would keep everyone together, liberals preferred municipalities and a National Guard rather than a small imperial army (Reid 58). This conflict has never been and probably will never be resolved in Brazil, as the arguments for big vs small governments still prevails in America today. They made other strides in politics with the induction of local presidents for the states that could be elected by wealthy, educated men, and held their first election 1872. The monarchy officially ended on November 15th, 1889, with a resignation from Dom Pedro to Deodoro de Fonseca.

With Deodoro de Fonseca as the new ruler, one of his first acts as military dictator was to create a constitution for the nation. This constitution was modelled after America’s constitution that had recently been created, and included 91 articles (Reid 70). Deodoro soon grew too old to run the country, and so he turned his rule over to his vice president Floriano Peixoto. Peixoto lost in the next election to Prudente de Morais, who had to deal with governor interactions and conflicts that still exist today between the Jacobins and national government. However, this First Republic finally broke during the coffee and modernism boom in the country, leading to the election of Vargas in 1930.

Although this time seems like a whirlwind of leaders, political views, and government officials, some progress was made on the abolition of slavery. Reid explains “After a long parliamentary battle, in 1871 a law was approved declaring that the children of slave women would be born free. This was followed by the formation in Sao Paulo of companies promoting the import of European immigrants,” (65). Promoting immigrants both allowed the country to grow as a nation and introduce many different cultures and identities, as well as outgrew the need for slavery. Because they were not needed, slaves began to leave their plantations in search of a new life, and their freedom was eventually granted in 1888 with the “Golden Law”.

Reflection

This chapter was important to me, as it really sunk into the turmoil of the country. Once they declared their independence, it was as if everything had gone back to normal; the current political figures didn’t change, the monarchy stayed the same, and the only ones really questioning their nation were the radical conservatives and liberals. The different governments following the monarchy were Brazil’s first taste of independence, and corruption in politics had begun since the 1800s.

Work Cited

Reid, Michael. Brazil: The Troubled Rise of a Global Power. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014. Print.