

Brazilian Panorama (1500-1889)



The Historical Perspective of Brazil: Imperial

Brazil: Imperial invites you on a journey through Brazilian history from the 16th through the 19th centuries. You will take the role of a famous European or Brazilian ruler, working to establish and grow your empire throughout the land. For the sake of a cohesive narrative, as well as simplicity of gameplay, every game element is ultimately oriented toward the purpose of empire.

However, many game elements reference individuals and groups which, in real life, resisted colonization and monarchy. Indigenous tribes consistently defended their lands, ceremonies, and ways of living. African slaves escaped their bondage and formed their own settlements. Many different groups of laborers, merchants, farmers, ranchers, immigrants, and others exerted their own cultural influence in their own ways.

If Brazil: Imperial is your first exposure to Brazilian history, we hope it makes you curious to learn more! We invite you to engage with the perspective of this game via the descriptions of the cards and tiles, as well as the following discussion of Brazil's economic history. We also encourage you to engage with other perspectives in other cultural media as well, so you can get a fuller picture of Brazilian history in all of its depth and richness.

Welcome to Brazil!

Brazil, the mysterious land of the Amazon—landmark of the country. With a hundred-kilometers-wide delta and tributaries spanning kilometers, it is the largest river in the world. Everyone who visits sees that this is a unique, beautiful, and exotic world. They also see new possibilities. The enormity of the Amazon, pouring from the jungle, unfortunately aroused greed and an urge to tame the land. This land was pristine, but the world moves forward just as a great river rolls its waters. All the newcomers in the past had trouble understanding that roads were unneeded, the branches and channels of the river were enough. It is so large that you can often not see from one bank to the other, and the jungle is so vast and life-giving that the need to create fields and cities is unnecessary.

At the time of European contact, as many as 2000 tribes, consisting of approximately 11 million people, lived in harmony with the world of the Amazon. They didn't need the achievements of civilization or material wealth pushed upon them. It took a long time for Europeans to understand this, if they ever learned at all.



Land of the Holy Cross

The first European explorers arrived in 1500 when the Portuguese, Pedro Álvares Cabral, arrived with his ship on the shores of the present-day Bahia. He arrived on the eve of St. George's Day (celebrating the slayer of the dragon), April 22. The expedition was the result of getting lost in a storm, as they sailed toward the Cape of Good Hope. They named this newly discovered land: Terra de Vera Cruz (Land of the True Cross), in gratitude to the Creator for saving their expedition.

Of course, as part of the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) concluded a few years earlier, the new land was considered Portuguese property. This treaty divided the New World between Spain and Portugal, and this division raised suspicions as to whether Cabral was indeed the first European, or whether Portugal already had information about the Frenchman Jen Cuisin (1488) or even Christopher Columbus, who may have sailed here in 1498. Captain Cabral, however, was the first to officially take over. He recognized the friendly natives as being under King Manuel I of Portugal and exchanged gifts of shirts, hats, and rosaries with them. He regarded the gentleness and openness of the natives as a fief tribute, for no one was able to translate their conversation. Cabral also left two convicts sentenced to death on shore and their punishment was commuted. The chronicler of the expedition wrote that the criminals wept and despaired, and the natives comforted them. Thus began the Portuguese colonization of the lands of present-day Brazil.

The first real colonizers arrived just a year later (1501), and three decades later the land was officially divided into latitudinal strips called capitanas, stretching further into the jungle, and were given to representatives of the Portuguese nobility to rule. They were to explore and colonize the new land, head west and gain wealth for themselves and the Portuguese Crown. The native peoples were to be Christianized and placed under royal rule. This was a time, however, when both Portugal and Spain had their eyes set on the East (especially India) and Africa. The New World was just beginning to be discovered. It was simply recognized that something of value could be found here as well.

The classic approach for the emerging colonial powers resulted in a rather negative initial assessment of the newly discovered lands. There was no accumulated wealth here, as local tribes did not accumulate gold and silver. There was no industrious agricultural population either, as the natives enjoyed the bounty and abundance of the jungle, and the small plots were not suitable for large latifundia for the Europeans. This land was overgrown and virgin. It was as difficult to plunder as the lands of Central America. At the same time, the Spaniards, on the other hand, were discovering numerous ore resources and rich native settlements in Bolivia and other northern South American countries.

Unfortunately, the Portuguese had to settle for seemingly less attractive loot—Brazilian wood (pau-brasil, “glowing wood”). Cabral himself took the first trunks with him when returning to Europe. It was suitable for furniture, boatbuilding, and the production of red dye. It quickly became a symbol of luxury, and clothes dyed with it had a noble scarlet, which conquered the upper classes. The Portuguese themselves did not realize what a treasure they had acquired or how much they would earn because of it.

Land of the Fire Tree

The first royal licenses to harvest pau-brasil were issued as early as 1503. King Manuel I quickly realized that monopolizing the firewood trade would bring him the fortune he desired. One hundred years later, it is estimated that more than a hundred ships a year were arriving in Europe packed to the brim with this wood. The wood, in turn, was not difficult to obtain, as the natives readily agreed to supply it to the trading factories. Thanks to this, the Portuguese Crown grew rich, taking advantage of the demand of the natives for various ornaments, simple tools, and fabrics. The coastal tribes took care of the logs by setting them on fire at the bottom, debarking them, splitting them into boards and transporting them. This resulted in the deforestation of the coasts and a plummeting economy.

At the same time, the process of population mixing began, as the sailors entered into relationships with local tribes, learned their culture, and customs (e.g. sleeping in hammocks, growing cassava), and thus began the process of creating a new community, already connected to the New World. However, at that time there was no mass colonization of new lands. Admittedly, in 1520 the first permanent colony of Sao Vicente (located in today's Sao Paulo state) was established there, but the Portuguese mainly needed commercial factories. They were only interested in exporting valuable timber. The land itself, fighting the jungle and developing settlements were not a priority.

The indigenous populations also realized over time that they were being exploited and the White people wanted them to work for nothing, or almost nothing. This resulted in the first resentments and made the indigenous people less and less supportive of the greed of the Portuguese. Gradually, good relations between the natives and the newcomers began to deteriorate, and there were many indications that the unreflective approach of the Europeans would soon result in fighting.



Pedro Álvares Cabral

Land of the Sugar Cane

This situation can be illustrated in the account of the Portuguese chronicler Pero de Magalhães Gândavo in 1533, when he decried that Satan must be responsible for the fact that the Land of the True Cross was already better known as the country of Brazil, where a fiery tree grew that brought wealth. He lamented that the tree for dyeing linen was more valued than the Christ Cross. Thus was born in the minds of Europeans: Brazil, a land famous for its thorn breccia. In addition to dye, this wood is also used to produce boards called pernambuco. As a heavy and durable raw material, they are also ideal for shipbuilding, capable of facilitating multiple voyages to the New World.

Such an economy based solely on the export of wood would have continued in the best possible way, were it not for the fact that these lands began to interest another European power—France. The French seized one of the Portuguese factories, and Portugal found that it would be difficult to take it back in such an underdeveloped land. This led to a compulsion to create more permanent colonies and to send more Portuguese to the New World and create a foothold there capable of resisting other colonial powers. However, it was difficult to find potential colonists to move overseas and develop Portuguese dominion. Only the impoverished nobility was willing to move in order to recoup the losses they had suffered at the end of the reconquista—over seven centuries of fighting to occupy the entire Iberian peninsula. Without the war they would have been quickly degraded, and yes they had a chance to conquer and carve out their piece of the New World. Divided into fifteen Capitannies stretching deep into the jungle, the land became another field of conquest. Each Capitanny received its own royal representative from among the nobility, who were tasked with defending their lands, developing them, and wielding administrative and fiscal power on behalf of the King. By 1600, 30,000 colonists had arrived, and the next quarter century brought another quarter as many. As colonists arrived, the natives died from war, forced labor, and disease. In the 100 years after European contact, around 90% of the native population had perished.

The royal monopoly on the Brazilian timber trade remained and the newcomers had to find another way to increase their wealth. So they built sugarcane mills with the approval of the governors, burned the jungle for fields, and soon began enslaving natives, forcing them to work or to sell them off—sometimes even to Europe. The Portuguese began to develop a system of large latifundia, which, based on slave labor, quickly created a new feudal order in Brazil with viceroys, vassals, and endowments, all at the expense of the indigenous population and natural resources. This was a true conquest without mercy. The Portuguese part of South America was poorly connected administratively with Europe and this system was simply to provide wealth to the Old Continent. What the practice was, no one has figured out. The Catholic Church, or more precisely the Jesuits, tried to defend the natives, but apart from creating villages administered by monks with forced Christianization and education, they were unable to change much. Multiplying fortunes was more important.

The turn of the 16th century brought another transformation, as the monopolization of the firewood trade led the colonizers to develop their own sugar production industry from which they made individual profits. Mills for the production of cane juice processed into sugar were built by the dozens. By the end of 1600 more than a hundred were built. They became a proof of status and a way to get rich. The King of Portugal only guarded his monopoly on Brazilian wood. Sugar production only required paying taxes on his own profits.

Brazilian lands became a major producer of sugar for Europe. The economy continued to be dominated by exports and served external needs while lacking the foresight of the latifundistas. Such an economy worked well with access to easy transportation, cheap or free labor, and continuous sales for their goods. The more the sugar production grew, the longer the transportation routes became. Farther from the coast, the sugar mills had to be built along with plantations, and the more difficult and less profitable transportation became. The higher the production was, the less the profit it provided.

Colonization and settlement were also subordinated to export. Instead of cities, there arose great residences of sugar farmers that exercised power over the lands entrusted to them, both fiscal and judicial. These settlements were overgrown with forced laborers, plantation workers, and serfs. The labor itself was increasingly based on slavery—first enslaved natives and later, purchased slaves from West Africa. Meanwhile, three port centers sprang up along the coast that served as windows to the world and a place where goods were loaded onto ships and taken overseas.

The development of large estates made people pay attention to the appearance of the mighty sugar workers' houses. Thus, artists and architects from Europe appeared who enriched the landscape and houses with paintings, sculptures, gardens and gave birth to colonial art which borrowed motifs from local nature and culture of the natives.

The 16th and 17th centuries were the “time of sugar.” It dominated as the main commodity and everything else that was produced, imported, and manufactured was used to obtain it. Cocoa and tobacco production also had a small share, but they were not as widespread, plus the Church issued numerous bans against smoking tobacco, usually considering it pagan.

The development of plantations faced a labor problem. While African slaves were eventually brought in, they initially tried to enslave the local population. Planters began to intensify the acquisition of labor from Angola (the Portuguese colony in Africa), who quickly replaced the natives and allowed the sugar industry to develop on an unprecedented scale. In the melting pot that Brazilian lands had become, another massive element emerged that was to become the foundation for Brazilian society—Africans. They brought their customs, their culture and traditions.

Natives who had been oppressed for years began to retreat into the jungle, and the African slaves forced into the country escaped from the plantations, which resulted in the creation of new clusters and settlements called Quilombos, which the Portuguese quickly tried to destroy. However, new ones were created all the time. In 1630, they managed to create the Palmeras—an area in the rainforest, where it is estimated that 20,000 former slaves tried to create their own state, from the settlements located in the vicinity, with all the production infrastructure, such as forges, and even their own cane plantations. They traded with the Portuguese on the coast, while fending off attacks from punitive expeditions. It was not until the end of the 17th century that the Portuguese managed to destroy them, after heavy fighting.

A war between the Netherlands and Portugal in union with Spain took place during the first half of the seventeenth century. These were the so-called “Sugar Wars.” The Dutch treated the natives better, and although they used both them and slaves from Africa as support in the wars, they had a very different

economic concept. They even talked outright about bringing in colonists—free peasants from northern Europe (including the lands of northern Poland) and banning slavery. Unfortunately, they couldn't win because they cared more about their lands in India, treating Brazil as a secondary goal. The defeat of the Dutch strengthened the power of the Portuguese and consolidated a system of possessions. The struggle against the Dutch, however, united the Portuguese population in Brazil and began the social changes that resulted in the future emergence of the first self-declared Brazilians, who no longer felt as connected to the Old World as their ancestors had.

Land of Diamonds and Gold

All those coming of their own accord to the New World were looking for wealth. The myths of Eldorado, of the Golden Cities, of the untold riches of America were vivid and often blinded the newcomers. The Spaniards found gold mines in Bolivia, and the Portuguese had to wait for a change of fortune. So they continued to search for veins of bullion and hoped that fate would change for them.

They succeeded only at the end of the 17th century. It was then (1693-95) that a few lucky people, whose names are not known today, discovered gold resources in the area of the present-day state of Minas Gerais and quickly began to establish gold mines. Thus, they were more like open-pit mines. There had already been small herds of known finds, but it wasn't until the turn of the 18th century that the Portuguese finally found their gold! No one expected how big a change this would cause.

The explorers, firstly, had to start sharing with the Crown, and secondly, they didn't work themselves so they needed a workforce. The sale of slaves to the gold-bearing lands was quickly banned. Sugar cane plantations suffered, and mines seemed more profitable. Prices for enslaved Africans and all materials began to rise. A real gold rush began as one region, one capital, began buying up goods from other regions. Problems also began in Europe itself, as the less well off Portuguese from the old continent saw an opportunity for themselves and began to cross over for assessments. The Crown tried to fight this. The powerful in Brazil tried to save their fortunes as one region. Like a black hole, it began to consume available resources, drawing people away and making prices horrendous. It is estimated that 30,000 prospectors arrived in the first decade of the 18th century. Such a large influx encouraged the mixing of social groups and by the end of the 18th century, the free population of Minas Gerais consisted of one-third mixed-race people. This phenomenon was prophetic for Brazil, which quickly became a region where all newcomers mixed, creating a multi-ethnic society.

The people of Sao Paulo, a region close to Minas Gerais, even demanded that they be given priority to buy gold-bearing plots. They were the ones who lived closest to the discovery and should benefit most from it. The whole matter had an additional economic subtext, because the newcomers monopolized the region's supply. They were able to pay higher prices. They had gold and the people of Sao Paulo had trouble competing with them.

The newcomers, called *emboabas* ("feathered" because they acted as if they had proverbially "grown feathers"), did not allow themselves such domination. As early as 1708, a conflict broke out, known as the *Guerra dos Emboabas* (War of the Feathered). It began when the *nouveaux riches* burned alive (some chroniclers use the word "roasted") two Sao Paulo residents. This started the burning of each other's settlements, and then real war broke out. The armies of the warring parties numbered two thousand and more men each. Lisbon first tried to calm the situation down, because all that mattered to the Crown was gold, and it was to be mined unhindered. According to the Portuguese mining codes the finder got half of the gold and the other half belonged to the Crown and local authorities. Realistically, however, the finder was only able to keep 20% after taxes. This was still a huge sum. Fights slowed down the extraction. Unfortunately, diplomacy did not bring effective results. In addition, the French appeared, taking advantage of social unrest to gain the area for themselves.



Sugar Cane

Thus, gold forced concrete decisions. The king of Portugal decided on a solid reform with amnesty for the participants of the clashes, the appointment of new authorities, and the creation of triple the number of mining towns here with a royal administration, to manage the mining. They also regulated trade and prices (including slaves).

Interestingly, gold mining was taught to the Portuguese by Africans, who were considered the best gold prospectors. The fate of these slaves was, on the one hand, quite hard because they spent a lot of time rinsing the spoils in water, but on the other hand, they were often allowed to keep their honor and buy themselves out after some time. This, over time, meant that there also began to be free black citizens of the new cities in the Minas Gerais region.

Gold was also found in Mato Grosso (1718), which shifted the search westward and more and more people began to enter the interior of the continent. This was done by people from Sao Paulo, which quickly became the capital of prospectors. Then bullion was found in Goias (1725) and finally, closer to the coast in Captain Bahia. Local gold rushes began to change the face of Brazil. Sugar cane plantations were increasingly threatened, and more and more of the colony's profits came from mining.

Unfortunately, this negatively affected the natives, who were killed and driven further west so that the colonizers could look for more deposits. The jungle and native settlements were destroyed.

It is estimated that in the 18th century, Brazil supplied four-fifths of the world's total gold supply. The Portuguese Crown was thus rapidly enriched and Brazil became its "favorite colony." In cooperation with England, bullion was distributed throughout the world. The English benefited from Portuguese goods and built their economic power on them. The mutual dislike of Spain was enough and few paid attention to the disparity in the Portuguese-English economic arrangements. Portugal supplied and England sold. In turn, they fought together against the Habsburgs.

Even the discovery of diamonds (also in Minas Gerais, in the north, in 1729) was muted, although the deposits were large. Gemstones also enriched the crown, but there was so much gold that it became the main commodity. Diamonds, though more valuable, were not as numerous. This was a time when sugar cane also lost its priority place on the list of wealth imported from Brazil (at least according to the Portuguese Crown).

The peak of extraction was in the mid-18th century. After that, the shallow deposits began to run out, but that didn't reduce the amount of taxes the people of Brazil had to pay. Further, the Crown just wanted to make money. Corruption and smuggling were also problems, as in order to avoid taxes on the dwindling output, gold and diamonds were smuggled in to continue living at the level that the local colonizers were used to.

Gold mining and the shift away from the community of large cane latifundistas changed the social structure of Brazil. By the end of the 18th century, there were 2.3 million inhabitants (including imported slaves). Within a century, the region of Minas Gerais grew from an area inhabited almost only by natives to the most populous region of Brazil with half a million inhabitants. In addition, they did not base their existence on cultivation. They obtained food from other areas of the colony. The decline in mining in the second half of the century meant that it was here that the first thoughts of independence emerged. The newcomers, coming from a less divided society, quickly saw that the Crown was only taking advantage of them, giving almost nothing in return.

Regions without mines tried to develop cotton cultivation, along with a return to the old order of latifundia, but it was already too late for that. Even the new treaty between Spain and Portugal (concluded in Madrid in 1750) could not stop the transition. Although it was intended to help manage the colony and strengthen the role of the Old World administration, it only aided the changes, as the establishment of boundaries between the two powers made it easier to explore the jungle and there were fewer skirmishes between colonial empires. The colonization of the south of the continent could begin.



Washing gold

The land of the new people

The newly colonized lands in the South did not become farmland in the sense of expanding sugarcane acreage. It quickly became apparent that the regions with mines needed food, especially meat, for the hardworking prospectors. It had to be cheap and in as large of quantities as possible. Thus began the era of large-scale grazing and ranching in the south.

While the northeastern lands were the land of cane crops, the south became the area where a new social group began to take shape. A whole new community of herdsmen emerged who drove cattle on horseback from one pasture to another. They were called *gaúchos*, and they are still a culturally distinct group in Brazil today.

This was another element that made the 18th century in Brazil a time of social change. The end of this century showed profound modifications in this area. People living like their ancestors in Europe were slowly ceasing to be the strongest group. Newcomers, who got rich on gold, and ranchers who were constantly increasing in number, began to take their place. The mines overgrew with settlements and were transformed into towns. The pastoral culture also resulted in the formation of a separate group that saw its future in farming and was not connected to the Old World. Additionally, this was a population that was already less European, as centuries of mixing local natives and Africans made them “Brazilians.” This had to create conflicts with the aristocracy, which was losing its influence. New people became a significant force. Among these new people were also a mass of descendants of natives, slaves, liberators, and newcomers. Thus, they rarely used slave labor and supported any liberation movements.

The mines supported the development of Rio de Janeiro, which became a major port for them. Salvador was to be the capital until 1907, but quickly lost its importance, although it continued to be a religious center. Large estates gave way to small farms. Production dominated by exports began to collapse as more and more people produced for domestic needs. Workshops replaced factories. There were more and more artisans, small factories, and internal trade. They could not be ignored. A new social order and a new society was forming. In 1786, the Portuguese Crown banned factories, including goldsmiths, in Brazil. Everything had to be delivered by Portugal, mainly on English ships. However, this did not stop the changes.

The land of conspirators and exiled rulers

The end of the 18th century was a time of rebellions and conspiracies. The most famous rebellion in Minas Gerais led by Joaquim José da Silva Xavier known as “Tiradentes” (the “Whisker” because he made a living as a dentist) ended in defeat, but was the spark for other Enlightenment revolts, such as that of the Tailors and other residents of the growing cities. In Europe it was the time of the French Revolution and in Brazil there were many calls for a society of equality, where there would be no aristocracy and everyone would be equal and free (except for the natives living in the jungle, of course).

However, the French Revolution brought a rebellion on the plantations in San Domingo, which gave the old fortunes of the cane sugar producers a boost. Sugar from Brazil became popular again as French sugar was unavailable. Portugal also sent more soldiers to the colonies. This did not stop subversive activity, but it did make the independence uprisings more difficult. However, this did not extinguish the desire for self-determination, and only aided organizational work.

Nor did anyone foresee Napoleon Bonaparte and his conquest of half of Europe. The Prince Regent of Portugal, John VI Bragança, had to flee with his entire court. On January 22, 1808, for the first time in European history, a ruler stood on Brazilian soil and began ruling the empire from there. He quickly crowned himself King of a united Portugal, Brazil and the Algarve. He also began the transformation of the entire country. He moved from Salvador to Rio de Janeiro and expanded the city, establishing schools and theaters, building palaces, and making the city the center of his power. Salvador remained the religious capital; Rio became the administrative capital. Art and architecture were supported. The king hoped that this would build a “New Portugal” with all its strengths and achievements.

Thus, the new king had to change all previous administrative decisions regarding permitted production and colonial rules. Factories were reopened, and investment in the development of communications began. The Portuguese ruler began to transform the colony into a real state, and thus, supported Portugal was lost to the French, but Portugal as an empire continued, but was managed from overseas. The Prince Regent had between 8,000 and 15,000 courtiers with him, but he could not fill all the necessary posts with them. He had to lean on the Brazilians and allow them into power, at the lower levels. This was another step toward an independent Brazil.

This, of course, benefited the English, who were given a privileged position and became the main country responsible for supplying Brazil and selling goods from America. They exploited this cynically and even tried to bring about their own colonization. While they did not succeed, they supported the separation of the Brazilian community from its roots in Europe. They forced Brazilians to unite so that the English could not completely and economically subjugate the colony and its people. This was another brick in the formation of the Brazilian Nation.

Land of the Brazilian Empire

Independence came in late 1822. John VI had gone to Portugal two years earlier to rebuild the country. In the New World, he left his son Pedro as regent. When things in Europe began to go badly, John VI had to fight his son Miguel for power in Portugal. As part of his consolidation of power, John deposed Pedro as regent. Finally, in December 1822, the bloodthirsty prince rebelled and dethroned his father. He proclaimed himself emperor and took the name Pedro the First. Thus began the time of the Brazilian Empire.

This change was inevitable. After thirteen years, with Rio de Janeiro as the capital of the kingdom, there was no return to Portuguese subordination. The rampage of foreign courtiers was also not to the taste of the people of Brazil. The dice had been cast and nothing could be as before. The Emperor entrusted José Bonifácio de Andrade, who was born and raised in Brazil, and who Brazilians call the “Patriarch of Independence,” with the leadership of the government. It was he who would lay the foundation for the changes that led to the creation of an independent state, with its own culture and society. Pedro’s son, Pedro the Second, already born in Brazil, became ruler very soon, at the age of five. His father, Pedro the First, went to fight in Portugal, feeling more like a European than a citizen of the New World. He hoped to rebuild the empire on both sides of the Atlantic. He did not succeed.

The regency did not last long, however, because soon the new Emperor (at the age of 14) took power and began to introduce reforms that made it possible for people born in Brazil to become officials. His reign saw the development of coffee cultivation and an influx of immigrants from Italy, which also enriched Brazilian culture. The country began a broad emancipation and reforms that led to the abolition of slavery in 1888 and laid the foundations of modern Brazil. Although the English continued to be privileged economic partners, the imperial period (and especially the reign of Pedro the Second) is judged as the time of the creation of a modern state that freed itself from colonialism and allowed the country to develop. To this day, the 1870s are called the golden age of the Brazilian empire. Art and science flourished, making Brazil an increasingly modern country.

In 1889, due to a revolt of the military, the Brazilian Empire collapsed and a republic was proclaimed. This was the birth of the modern state of the post-colonial era. Although it had many weaknesses, it was built on the foundation of a society in which different ethnicities had mixed for four centuries.

The board game Brazil is about how Brazil was created, how today’s Brazilian society was born, what turn of events influenced the changes, and how much evil happened before we can talk about an independent state, where the aristocracy is no longer dominant. Play and see, because there is a lot of talk about wars and generals, but in fact, states are born through economic and cultural development.

Enjoy the game.



Pedro the First