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**Membership Required: *Juventude Brasileira* and Fascist Education in Brazil's *Estado Novo* Dictatorship**

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# **Membership Required: *Juventude Brasileira* and Fascist Education in Brazil's *Estado Novo* Dictatorship**

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## **Abstract**

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Brazil's *Estado Novo* dictatorship (1938-1945) saw the establishment of a new national youth organization called *Juventude Brasileira* (Brazilian Youth). Founded by Hitler Youth-inspired bureaucrats, the organization's operations show how profoundly fascism pervaded the inner-workings of this regime, and more generally, how much educational policy reflects the most foundational priorities of an authoritarian government. However, the persistent dissent against *Juventude Brasileira*, from within the Ministry of Education and ultimately by a dissatisfied public clamoring for democracy, also illustrates paths of resistance against authoritarianism.

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**Keywords:** history of education [Brazil], *Estado Novo* [Brazil], Getulio Vargas, *Juventude Brasileira*, youth organization, fascism

# Membresía Requerida: *Juventude Brasileira* y Educación Fascista en la Dictadura del *Estado Novo*

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## Resumen

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La dictadura de *Estado Novo* en Brasil supuso la aparición de una nueva organización juvenil llamada *Juventude Brasileira* (Juventud Brasileña). Fundada por burócratas inspirados en las Juventudes Hitlerianas, las operaciones de la organización muestran hasta qué punto el fascismo impregnó el funcionamiento interno de este régimen y, de forma más general, cuánto reflejan las políticas educativas las prioridades más fundamentales de un gobierno autoritario. En cualquier caso, la disidencia permanente contra *Juventude Brasileira*, desde dentro del Ministerio de Educación y, finalmente, por parte de un insatisfecho clamor público en favor de la democracia, también muestran vías de resistencia contra el autoritarismo.

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**Palabras clave:** historia de la educación [Brasil], Estado Novo [Brasil], Getulio Vargas, *Juventude Brasileira*, organización juvenil, fascismo

In the 1920s, Brazil was engulfed in a generational crisis. The rigidly oligarchic political and economic power structure of the so-called “Old Republic” faced challenges from diverse sectors of Brazilian society, and in 1930 the broad-based “Liberal Alliance” led by lawyer and opposition politician Getúlio Vargas rose to power with widespread popular support. But by the mid-1930s ideological and political opposition to Vargas’s regime, especially from partisans hoping for more radical change, contributed to a tumultuous “state of siege” that bred paranoia and violence throughout Brazil (Hilton, 1975, p. 168). The wide range of violent uprisings of these years—including communist, liberal, and fascist rebellions—ultimately allowed Vargas to consolidate his power in a new authoritarian political formation: the *Estado Novo*, or “New State” regime.

Both Vargas and his political rivals sought influence over youth as a way of influencing the future shape of society. Both sides used the rhetoric of protecting the young as a weapon in their political struggle and both pursued the formation of youth cadres to politicize young people. After the establishment of the *Estado Novo*, however, it was Vargas who was most able to enforce his vision of youth’s proper role in society. A new national youth organization called *Juventude Brasileira* (Brazilian Youth, JB), established shortly after the founding of the *Estado Novo*, became an important instrument of control in Vargas’s regime.

The *Estado Novo* has long been understood by historians, both in North America and Brazil, as having been purely personalistic and “without any consistent ideological basis” (Skidmore, 1967, p. 32). “The regime of ‘His Majesty, the President,’”—an old saying that still has currency in Brazil—underscores the almost monarchical conception of sovereignty that has sometimes held sway in the country, with power invested in the body of the chief executive rather than any party or popular movement (de Scatimburgo, 1982, p. 49).<sup>1</sup> However, more recent scholarship that deeply explores the regime’s bureaucratic archives has tended to support the notion that there were clear ideological foundations to Vargas’s dictatorship, built upon home-grown nationalist corporatism and directly inspired by European fascism. Brazilian historian of education Ademir Valdir dos Santos (2012) strongly defends the characterization of the *Estado Novo* as fascist. Like other fascist governments of its time, the regime used the language of “patriotic exaltation”, “revolutionary nationalism”, and the need for “societal renewal after a period

of purported decadence” (pp. 138, 146). Simultaneously, the regime radically expanded its oversight at every level of public life, attempting to eradicate all dissent while actively increasing lawmaking and law-enforcing abilities (Bica & Corsetti, 2012, pp. 253-79).

The history of Juventude Brasileira places a frequently neglected historical pattern into sharp relief: education and youth policy are foundational to the formation of authoritarian nationalist regimes. As Peter Van Der Veer (1998) writes, “It is especially in the history of education that one may find the history of modernity illuminated” (p. 290). JB’s intended purposes were similar to those of youth organizations in other fascist countries at the time.<sup>2</sup> Certainly the most infamous of these, the *Hitlerjugend* of Nazi Germany, was but one in a cohort that also included Italy’s *Opera Nazionale Balilla* (later the *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio*) and fascist Portugal’s *Mocidade Portuguesa* among others. Regardless of origins, all of these authoritarian youth organizations saw education as central to their missions and their missions as central to the goals of the regime as a whole. In the process of Nazification, Fascicization—or Estadonovicization—education was, as Alessio Ponso (2015) has written, “as essential as coercive repression, necessary to change the habits and character of their peoples and to create disciplined societies united by a uniform national political culture” (p. 4). The history of education during the Estado Novo, from curriculum development in the halls of the Ministry of Education to student essays and playground games, provides surprisingly wide-ranging evidence of the powerfully ideological nationalist character of the regime.

In this article, I first provide an overview of the ideological divisions that characterized 1930s Brazil, especially focusing on how these competing movements understood youth and sought to involve young people in their struggle for supremacy in the country. I then turn to the rise of the Estado Novo dictatorship. Youth and education were immediately taken up as priorities for the regime, and the creation of Juventude Brasileira became its hallmark policy. Using primary sources to explore JB’s creation, operation, and eventual dissolution, I show that this youth organization’s history provides a particularly clear view of the fascistic character of the Estado Novo regime. The “Christian Corporatism” that motivated its creators was directly inspired by and formed a cohesive whole with Fascist movements elsewhere in the world during that era.

While Juventude Brasileira exemplifies the role of youth policy in the formation of fascist regimes, it also reveals key insights into the patterns and practices of resistance to fascism. While the Estado Novo operated on the youth as a tool to leverage their power, a close examination of Juventude Brasileira's rise and fall also shows the limitations of forcibly imposing fascist education in a racially, culturally, and ideologically diverse society like early-twentieth-century Brazil. Throughout the organization's short life, teachers, parents, and policymakers all voiced skeptical and moderating voices that weakened the regime's ability to indoctrinate and militarize children, and ultimately undermined fascism's hold over the country as a whole.

### **The Rationale of the *Estado Novo***

In 1934, the broad-based revolution that had brought Getúlio Vargas to power passed a reformist Constitution and shortly thereafter Vargas was elected to a four-year term as President. Though violence was required to install Vargas in 1930, and to put down secessionist revolts like the Paulista War of 1932, by 1934 a stable and even partially democratic government seemed poised to move forward with its social and economic reforms. These were, as Daryle Williams (2001) writes, "critical years," when the new constitution held out the promise of extending enfranchisement, protecting civil liberties and employment protections, and bringing a liberal, inclusive democracy to Brazil for the first time (p. 60). However, by the time of scheduled elections in 1938, Brazil had just faced four politically tumultuous years marked by partisan revolts and finally the imposition of a nationalist and authoritarian dictatorship.

Throughout much of the 1930s, Vargas saw Communism as the gravest threat to his regime. Founded with Comintern support in 1922, the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) had seduced many former anarchists from the industrial working class (significantly comprised of Iberian and Italian immigrants) and gained support in the countryside while adherents campaigned against the Old Republic in the late-1920s. By the mid-1930s the party saw itself in a position to challenge the Vargas presidency. In 1935, Communist rebels rose up in the cities of Natal, Recife, and Rio de Janeiro, and quickly found in their swift defeat that they were *not* in a position to

challenge the regime. To use Shawn C. Smallman's (2002) succinct turn-of-phrase, "The rebels never had a chance" (p. 51). The resulting crackdown led to mass imprisonments of Communists and a pervading sense of paranoia in the government.

Though the PCB was hardly a serious threat to the military and police power of the Brazilian state, neither before nor after the 1935 uprising, Vargas's fears of communist infiltration and plotting were not unfounded. Since the 1920s, Brazilian communists had propagandized heavily those sectors of society they deemed most supportive and/or in need of their revolution, including the young. In the 1930s, communist intrigue riddled even the tamest stronghold of middle-class Brazilian society: the normal school. In 1932, some boys from the Red Federation of Students (*Federação Vermelha de Estudantes*) passed out bulletins written "especially for normalistas" to the girls at Rio's Institute of Education one day after classes. When the bulletins showed up littered around classrooms and school bathrooms, the Institute's director, Lourenço Filho, reported the incident to the police ("*Instituto da Educação Documents*", ca. 1932-1936.).

A 1936 incident at the same normal school shows just how much the stakes of Brazil's 'red scare' had increased after the 1935 Communist uprising. The school librarian, Dona Margarida, revealed to Lourenço Filho that she had uncovered an assassination plot against Getúlio Vargas tangentially involving one or more Institute teachers. At Lourenço Filho's request, the police took depositions from various teachers. The next week, an Institute of Education teacher was interviewed by *O Povo* newspaper accusing Lourenço Filho himself of being a communist, a Bolshevik, and, correspondingly, of hiring the sort of teachers who would want to do a thing like assassinate Vargas. What more evidence do you need, the paper asked, than the presence of books about the Soviet Union in the school library? Lourenço Filho's letter of explanation to the President, clearly penned immediately upon his first reading of the *O Povo* article, is panicked. His normally curved and elegant handwriting is replaced by a scrawl as he explained his actions over the past week, defended his innocence, and decried communism. Lourenço Filho, a friend of Education Minister Gustavo Capanema and of Vargas himself, retained his position unscathed ("*Instituto da Educação Documents*", ca. 1932-1936.).

In the mid-1930s, a much more powerful and realistic threat to the Vargas government came from the same ideological sphere that had brought the regime to power. Liberalism, as both a domestic and international force, both tangibly and ideologically menaced the regime. The National Liberal Alliance (ANL), founded in 1935, was one of the most numerically and politically significant oppositional forces during Vargas's presidency. According to Brian P. Owensby (1999), as many as four hundred thousand members joined the organization within just four months of its founding (p. 141). While the ANL did maintain a limited political alliance with the PCB, their agenda was ultimately electoral (Smallman, 2002, pp. 51, 206). The Rio de Janeiro youth-directed magazine of the ANL, *Juventude*, described itself as "a democratic magazine [...] that will fight for the immediate interests of youth", including better working conditions in factories and fields, fewer working hours to improve health, free medical and dental care for students and workers, primary schools that distribute food and clothing, lower fees for secondary schools, and freedom of thought, and "against the anti-democratic, military, and dictatorial clowns" ("*Apresentação*", 1935). Their calls for more fully-realized electoral democracy and a greater challenge to industrial oligarchies quickly won the ANL the ire of Vargas's national security forces and the organization was summarily outlawed just a few months after its founding.

After 1935, with the apparent destruction of Communism and Liberalism as tools for protesting the inadequacies of Vargas's regime, the far right rose to fill the vacuum of dissent. The Brazilian Integralist Action (AIB, or *Integralistas*), was a fascist political party strongly influenced by both Portuguese and Italian fascism (Bertonha, 2011, pp. 65-87). Founded in 1932, the "Green Shirts" spent much of the mid-1930s clashing with Communists and Liberals in the streets of Brazil (Hilton, 1975, pp. 169-170). The party was particularly attractive to teenaged boys and young men of European descent, and after 1935, their numbers expanded and even Vargas began to adopt their symbols and slogans, including using their motto "Fatherland, family, and religion" in major speeches (Hilton, 1975, pp. 168-69). In 1937, as the country prepared for the upcoming presidential election, armed conflicts between Integralists and disenfranchised left-wing dissenters terrorized many Brazilian cities (Hilton, 1975, pp. 169-170).

In this struggle of ideologies, many key government and military leaders attributed the violence and political chaos of the mid-1930s to "aliens,"



“internationalism,” and “foreign ideologies” (Smallman, 2002, p. 55). Such rhetoric coincided with a sense that Europe (the source of these alien philosophies) was past its time and even on the verge of collapse. In 1934, Carlos Martins, later ambassador to Washington, wrote to Foreign Minister Afrânio de Melo Franco, warning of Europe’s “collective insanity” and of the “imminent change or end of European civilization” (as quoted in Hilton, 1975, pp. 5-6). It seems that even children may have sensed this preoccupation with Europe’s coming demise. In 1936, as the Second Italo-Ethiopian War raged on the other side of the planet, a teacher from Rio’s Escola Estados Unidos sketched notes on an overheard conversation between a group of her twelve- and thirteen-year-old students: “Italy won, but she’s gonna go at it with England. Then England will fight with Germany, Germany with France, France with Spain, Spain with Portugal, and Europe will end.” According to the teacher, one student even framed his contribution to the conversation as evidence of the superiority of Brazilian “racial democracy”<sup>3</sup> over European nationalist imperialism, saying, “The ‘Selaisie’ says that as long as there’s even one black man left in Abyssinia, he’ll keep fighting. But as long as there are blacks, Italy will keep fighting. She doesn’t like blacks” (as quoted by Ramos, ca. 1937).

As war loomed in Europe and European ideologies destabilized Brazil, Vargas “conspicuously” endorsed no candidate for the 1938 election (Skidmore, 1967, p. 24). Having made his plans and appointed a friendly Minister of War in (later president) Eurico Dutra, Vargas released reports of a supposed Communist plot of mass assassinations of elected officials. On November 10, 1937, with both the military and the Integralist party behind him, Vargas declared the Estado Novo (Skidmore, 1967, pp. 24-29).

### **Policies and Instruments of Control of the *Estado Novo***

A children’s book about the life of Getúlio Vargas, later disseminated to every schoolchild in Brazil, described the advent of the Estado Novo like this:

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of November, 1937, the congressmen arriving at the capitol found the doors closed: nevermore will you hear there those stupid and useless chats and 200 mil-reis a day for each of them. The people filled the streets with joy. The sky filled with stars. On that night, a night filled with light and happiness, the President arrived at

the radio microphone and announced the birth of the Estado Novo and the death of the Most Excellent and Illustrious Madame Politics... And on that day even the worms complained that her rotting corpse was poisonous (Tia Olga, 1939, pp 71-72).

Vargas's radio broadcast and release of a new Constitution on the evening of November 10, 1937, spelled out many of the new policies of the Estado Novo. Vargas abrogated the 1934 Constitution, dissolved congress, gave himself a six-year term and the power to rule by decree, and suspended interest payments on foreign debt. "The constitutional organization of 1934, poured in the classic molds of liberalism and a representative system, revealed lamentable faults," he argued in a speech that night, and "[was] outdated in relation to the spirit of the time [...] and intended for a reality that had ceased to exist" (as quoted in Hilton, 1975, p. 171).

Though the initial response in Brazil was either quiet or quieted, the rest of the world was either shocked or intrigued by Vargas's move. *Newsweek* claimed "Vargas Makes Brazil First American Fascist State" (1937 November 22). The next week, *Newsweek* followed on with the headline: "Fellow Dictators Now Dream of Imitating Vargas" (1937 November 29). The German Ambassador to Brazil wrote blithely: "As for the effect of the turn of events on Brazil's relations with Germany, it can neither economically nor politically be an unfavorable one, since the president, who is friendly towards us, remains in power" (as quoted in Hilton, 1975, p. 173). Though in the coming months Germany and Brazil did draw closer together economically, Stanley Hilton (1975) argues that Vargas worried about his new regime's close links with fascist governments and the Integralist party in Brazil. The first few months of the *Estado Novo*, though proclaimed throughout the world as a fascist dictatorship, were largely concerned with limiting the influence and power of the Integralists, perhaps to demonstrate that this change in government was a purely "Brazilian phenomenon" (Hilton, 1975, p. 174). The AIB was outlawed and then decimated after instigating a putsch in early 1938.

Despite this rejection of Integralism, the consolidation of the *Estado Novo* reflected in many ways the transformations that fascist states in Europe were making. The new Constitution of 1937 was largely based on Poland's April Constitution, and in some Brazilian circles was even disparagingly dubbed *a Polaca* (the Polish one), also a nickname for European prostitutes (Levine, 1998, p. 51). Besides deconstructing all forms of electoral politics, the

Constitution and early decrees implemented new mechanisms of authoritarian control. The national police, which had had anti-insurgent authority since 1935, became a full-fledged secret police under Vargas's direct control for silently stamping out dissent. The Department of Propaganda underwent a partial merger with the "Special Police" to become the Department of Printing and Propaganda (DIP) that oversaw censorship of all books, periodicals, and plays, as well as speeches and correspondence by government officials. By late 1938, sixty percent of all newspaper and magazine articles were actually written by the DIP (Levine, 1998, p. 60).

How would this new regime and its authoritarian apparatuses affect young people? Vargas had made the improvement of living conditions for children an important part of his regime's policies and rhetoric since the early 1930s, and young people featured prominently in the new estadonovista Constitution. Article 127 reads "Children and youth should be the objects of care and special guarantees on the part of the State, which will take all the means necessary to assure them the physical and moral conditions for a safe and healthy life and the harmonious development". "Moral conditions" and "harmonious development", two ideas which belie the conservative and corporatist ideology of the new regime, would guide the government's interactions with *Juventude Brasileira*.

### **Juventude Brasileira**

The earliest seeds for the formation of a national youth organization were planted in early 1938 by Francisco Campos, Minister of Justice and one of the most powerful far-rightists in the Estado Novo. In memos disseminated to the President's office and the Ministries of War and Education he proposed the creation of a Youth Army, specifically referencing the youth groups in Germany, Italy, and Portugal, with military ranks and ruled by military discipline. Using the highly nationalistic language that had already become typical, both publicly and privately, in the Brazilian government, Campos wrote that he envisioned youth "oriented in a single direction [...] and disciplined in the elevated principles of patriotism, which is the appointed service that the Estado Novo gives to the Patria and, above all, to the Future of Brazil" (Campos, ca. 1938).

Campos believed that a centralized and disciplined youth organization along the lines of the Hitler Youth could help inculcate the regime's goal of national devotion in young people, especially those from the urban working class, which as late as the 1930's was described as "essentially foreign" (Gambini, 1977, pp. 58-59). A British visitor to Brazil in 1940 wrote, "Germany, like Japan, considers her immigrants in South America as 'minorities', fellow countrymen that can conveniently acquire foreign citizenship but that should retain their ties of cultural and political utility to the Fatherland. (...) In fact, the German consular corps and commercial agents have already begun to infiltrate the Brazilian colonies with their programs and propaganda of 'racial solidarity'" (as quoted in Gambini, 1977, p. 61). Though in 1938 Brazil maintained friendly relations with the countries that had contributed most of its immigrants—Italy, Portugal, Spain, Germany, and Japan—Campos hoped a youth army could effectively indoctrinate the next generation to see themselves as Brazilians *first*.

In response to Campos's call to arms, synopses of different extant youth organizations were quickly disseminated to the relevant Ministers, including descriptions of the structure, funding schemes, and activities of Germany's *Hitlerjugend*, Italy's *Opera Nazionale Balilla*, and Portugal's *Mocidade Portuguesa*. One industrious bureaucrat even researched parallel organizations in the United States before concluding that "the tradition of North American liberalism does not permit a national organization connected to the state", and so youth leagues were private, like the YMCA (Capanema, 1938 September 19).

Minister of War and key co-conspirator in the establishment of the regime, General Eurico Gaspar Dutra, recommended caution when trying to emulate these foreign fascist organizations. "[T]he organization of Brazilian youth [must] be made in accordance with our realities, good or bad, and never under the models that don't adjust to our environment... Listen, Brazil is essentially different from those nations." First, he argued, Brazil was defined by social and geographic heterogeneity and disparity:

The conditions of life in Milan are more or less similar to those in Turin. And the poorest town in Germany still has a school, a sports field, and a police station... Brazil has cities that are bigger than Belgium, and where life works quite differently than in a typical Portuguese village.

Second, illiteracy, not lack of military discipline, was the most important hindrance to the nation. Third, he noted, Brazil, unlike these European models, was safely situated in South America, and so was not “under perpetual threat of war.” (Dutra, ca. 1938).

This criticism prompted discussion on the role of militarism in the proposed “Youth Army.” The Ministry of War was itself divided on the issue. Dutra questioned the necessity of military leadership after calculations revealed that the proposed format would require about one fifth of all sergeants in the Brazilian military to serve as cell leaders. The Director of the Military Library believed that a militarist model was necessary, but perhaps could be done more in the style of Scouting, though “All international institutions, including Scouting, present the danger of infiltration by propagandistic elements with exotic ideas or of the influences of organizations like ‘Intelligence Service’, ‘Gestapo’, ‘Komintern’, ‘Secret Service’, ‘Service d’Informations’, etc.” Of most importance, he argued, was that boys be instructed and disciplined by men.

With the type of instruction that’s practiced in Brazil, we will risk, as we’ve already seen examples of, creating a generation of weak and useless *rapazes* (young men), effeminated by the Freudian influence that they feel during their entire period of development.

He blamed the lack of male students at Brazil’s overwhelmingly female normal schools for this deficiency (Xavier, 1940 May 21). Ideally, a regimented and militarized organization could overcome the hypotrophied masculinity of Brazil’s rising generation of men.

The Ministry of Education, under Gustavo Capanema, expressed deep concerns about structuring the organization as a “youth army” at all. An unsigned letter from the ministry argued that excessive military presence would create distrust, especially among the partisans that the regime had dedicated the mid-1930s to destroying. “If it assumes a paramilitary character or a fascist coloration, Integralism and communism will rise again.” However, did that mean that it would be better to wait and see how the coming war ends before deciding how to organize Brazilian youth?

No! No matter the economic and military outcome of the war, liberal democracy has already lost politically and socially. Its fundamentals are irredeemably condemned... Christian corporatism that smashes Jewish financiers and international monopolies will float above the waters of the coming flood (“*Notas reservadas*”, ca. 1939).

What form, then, would a “Christian corporatist” youth organization take?

From Campos’s proposal of a youth army in early 1938 until March 1940, the Ministries of War and Education were overtaken by incessant bureaucratic squabbling on this issue, with only occasional input from the President’s Office. The Ministry of War hashed out a proposed decree by mid-1938, for “The National Organization of Youth”, voluntary for all children ages 8 to 17, self-funded, directed under the National Division of Eugenics and Medical Assistance, and featuring frequent anthropometric assessments, rural labor rotations, and a great deal of pre-military training. Minister of Education Gustavo Capanema responded to the proposal, “Millions of 8 to 18 years olds do not an army make!” He urged the elimination of work rotations, medical assistance, and military education for a focus on moral and civic instruction, under the direction of the Ministry of Education, beginning at age seven (when children started school), and obligatory for all students lest it become partisan. In conclusion, he noted, “If you think it’ll pay for itself through member donations, you’re crazy” (Capanema, 1938 September 19). The President’s contribution to the process included exhortations to wrap the whole thing up, and occasional gibes at Capanema. While hashing out some final details in late 1939, including which historical figure would be the patron of the organization, Vargas joked about Capanema’s choice of the eighteenth-century revolutionary Tiradentes as the group’s symbolic patron, who like Capanema was from the state of Minas Gerais: “Tiradentes was basically impotent and hardly an exemplary hero!” (Vargas, ca. 1939).

Finally on March 8, 1940, Decree-Law No. 2,072 established Juventude Brasileira, ‘Brazilian Youth’. Its structure closely cleaved to Capanema’s proposal made a year before, though its patron was the Duque de Caxias, a nineteenth-century war hero who, like Vargas, was from Rio Grande do Sul state. Upon publication of the decree, individuals and organizations that had been tangentially related to the process of its creation warmly congratulated Capanema, who had ultimately made himself the brains behind the JB and the

man on top of the organization chart. The director of the Museu Paulista praised the JB for encouraging:

The security and enhancement of the Fatherland, love of military duty, discipline, attachment to the home, perseverance in work, perfection of physical education and respect for hygiene, reverence for the flag and national anthem, vehement interest in intellectual and cultural development,” in short, all the nationalist and corporatist values that the regime espoused (de Tauney, 1940 May 20).

The Boy Scouts of Brazil, founded in 1924, immediately offered to integrate with Juventude Brasileira, and a decree quickly took them up on the offer, effectively dissolving the Scouts as an independent organization (*União de Escoteiros Brasileiros*, 1940 March; *Decreto-Lei 2.310*, 1940).

Though 211,000 young people took part in inaugural parades throughout Brazil in the spring of 1940, it took years more for the Ministry of Education to resolve what JB would actually *do*. Questions of uniforms, badges, flags, and funding consumed uncountable man-hours of bureaucratic work. Between 1940 and 1943, 17 decrees issued by Vargas dealt with Juventude Brasileira. Months of debates preceded a 1940 contest in which students would write an epic poem about JB, with the winning entry to be enshrined as the organization’s “official poem.” Ironically, in the end all of the entries were deemed unacceptable. The Ministry promulgated a long-list of holidays to be celebrated in JB cells—33 in total. October 23<sup>rd</sup> was Day of the Aviator, September 21<sup>st</sup> Tree Day, April 7<sup>th</sup> Abdication of Emperor Pedro I Day, November 27<sup>th</sup> Day of the Communist Uprising of 1935 and its Victims. Most important, April 19<sup>th</sup>, Getúlio Vargas’s birthday, was the Day of Youth (“*Documentation of the Juventude Brasileira*”, ca. 1943). The slough of holidays each had an accompanying historical, national, or ethical lesson, but also seemed designed to make work—to keep them busy, both the bureaucrats and the children.

Eventually JB came to have two primary activities: extra classes at school led by specially screened teachers that inculcated moral and civic duties, and mass rallies in support of Getúlio Vargas and the

Estado Novo. Capanema, considering what lessons were most important for Brazilian youth of the 1940s to learn, opined:

The Brazilian *moço* (young person) is a severe judge of his ancestors, because unfortunately he does not believe in his race and admires all things foreign ... The young generations were educated in the illusion of Brazil being a latent paradise that hasn't already bettered itself solely through the negligence of its inhabitants (Ministry of Education, 1941 June).

The work of JB, then, would be to instill nationalism and respect for a corporatist social order, where each individual had an appointed and respected (if necessarily limited) role in society with corresponding duties and obligations. Both of these values could be promoted, the regime believed, through stimulating a cult to Vargas.

In the lesson plan disseminated for the May 1<sup>st</sup> Workers' Day holiday, all of these elements featured prominently. On April 30<sup>th</sup> students of every age at every school in Brazil would be taught, first, that Workers' Day is not just a day off school, but "a day of spirit and fervor, a day of national confraternity"; second, that through learning to work "the young can prove that ultimately all professions in a Christian and democratic society are equally noble"; and third, that workers' rights had already been guaranteed by President Getúlio Vargas, including the eight hour work day, holidays, minimum wage, pensions, workplace safety, and unions (Ministry of Education, 1943). Because Capanema had successfully lobbied for JB membership to be mandatory for all students, this message's range was huge. Perhaps as little as 25% of the approximately 8 million Brazilian children in this age bracket were enrolled in school in 1940, but that still means 1 out of every 20 Brazilians studied this exact lesson on April 30, 1943 (Plank, 1996).

The mass rallies of Juventude Brasileira were events on an enormous scale and tended to have explicit pro-Estado Novo messages, the easier to hear and understand in a crowd of thousands, the better. At one Rio de Janeiro rally, a teenaged JB member was chosen to deliver a speech written by the Department of Printing and Propaganda on the role of the Brazilian girl and woman in society. In this speech the socially conservative gender values of corporatism were made uncommonly explicit, perhaps because it was written for a young audience,



The Brazilian woman must fight, fight hard, not to become equal to man in his daily work, but fight to make healthy homes that men will protect... If the husband can't make enough to support a couple, the wife can certainly go to work, but only if it's strictly necessary. And she should still do the work of running the house, where she's irreplaceable. A single girl can more easily work and *should* (Menezes, 1941 August 19).

These rallies, though made up of youth, also preached powerful messages to adults regarding the extent of Vargas's power and authority in the country. A 1942 rally speech by Capanema hinted at the apparent effectiveness of Vargas's domination of young Brazilians, saying,

There was once a time when education was considered preparation for life, a preparation for the future. You were for the future. Not today! Today, with the support of President Getúlio Vargas, you already *are*. That is to say, you already exist, as a present reality, with a present value, as an essential force of the present (Capanema, 1942 April 18).

He concluded, "Getúlio Vargas is hope. Getúlio Vargas is the greatest hope. Before him your attitude must be, Brazilian youth, nothing less than undying loyalty" (Capanema, 1942 April 18).

But by 1942, the role and rhetoric of JB was already being questioned. After years of diplomatic negotiations, and finally under strong pressure from the United States, Brazil entered World War II on the side of the Allies. Vargas and the Ministry of Education no longer wanted JB to so closely resemble Europe's fascist youth armies. As a show of friendship with the U.S., JB added a new holiday and lesson plan to celebrate the bicentenary of the birth of Thomas Jefferson in April 1943, but 1943 was almost wholly given over to squabbling about how the JB might subtly restructure while still maintaining its nationalist, pro-Vargas color (Ministry of Education, 1943 April 13). The daily functioning of the organization changed little.

By 1945, the Estado Novo was under fire. The contradictions of Brazilian troops fighting and dying in Italy to defend democracy, while being unable to vote in their own country (Garcia, 1982, pp. 17-18), had slowly contributed to

a storm of dissent. Though Vargas had promised an election at the end of the war, distrust of the regime exploded in early 1945. In March of that year, most leading newspapers concerted to stop submitting articles to the DIP for censorship. One of the very first issues they addressed after refusing censorship was Juventude Brasileira. A series of articles in Rio de Janeiro's leading newspapers lambasted the organization and its leadership. Minister of Education Capanema was framed as the nefarious mastermind behind a dark plan to brainwash the children of Brazil.

The Minister who walked around after the Revolution of 1930 wearing a black shirt, wanted to give his own timid contribution to the undisguised fascism that's been instituted in this country since 1937. He adopted a plan similar to *Giuventu Fascista* [sic], the administration of which he considered his totalitarian duty ("Giuventu", 1945).

He was particularly criticized for having invented the stipulation that JB membership be mandatory, which at the time he had argued would prevent it from being partisan. *Correio da Manhã* interpreted it as another element of the brainwashing:

It was the obligatory presence of all students of all ages that gave the impression that he was trying to instill in those developing minds the principle of respect to the dictatorial regime and to the men that needed to take advantage of this regime in order to perpetuate their own power ("Giuventu", 1945).

However, the papers also argued that Capanema's scheme had been an utter failure. "If there was a fascist plan that never took hold in this country, despite the interests of the Estado Novo dictatorship, it was this 'Juventude Brasileira' styled after the 'Hitler Youth.'" Indeed, claimed *O Jornal*, the JB had never truly existed because Brazilian youth "always manifested an instinctive revulsion for this organization, inspired and designed after the Nazi model," and any time they had marched in parades and "waved the flags" they had been forced to by the DIP ("*Sem Junção*", 1945).

Juventude Brasileira truly had been designed to indoctrinate youth with loyalty to the regime and its "Christian corporatist" values. It was invented as

a mechanism of control, to enhance the power and legitimize the authority of the Estado Novo. But in 1945, Juventude Brasileira became one of the most powerful arguments *against* the regime. In a very youthful country like mid-century Brazil, almost every single member of urban, middle-class society would have been affected by the requirements of JB, as their child, grandchild, niece or nephew was obliged to buy uniforms, recite anthems, and attend parades celebrating Vargas's power. As the legitimacy and physical domination of the Estado Novo was increasingly challenged, JB became a singularly repulsive aspect of the dying regime, one that had the reach and rhetorical power to unite millions against the regime.

The organization fell apart quite quickly in late 1945. In August the Rio de Janeiro school directors' union wrote Capanema about an upcoming scheduled JB rally. They promised they would try to make the students march, but vacillated:

It is feared that any attitude of insistence assumed by the directors of the schools could provoke disfavorable public relations and unforeseen consequences. Feeling, on one hand, responsibility to prevent this, and on the other, not wanting to cease collaborating for the glory of civic celebrations, and in face of the outbreak of flu that, even though it is getting better, is not yet wiped out, we directors decided to consult with you, Minister, on what we should now do concerning the convenience of whether or not the parade should happen (Lund, 1945 August 17).

The parade did not take place. In October, the regime fell and JB bureaucrats stopped receiving paychecks. Juventude Brasileira simply faded away.

The history of Juventude Brasileira offers valuable insights into the nature of Brazilian society in the late 1930s and early 1940s and, more broadly, into the role of education in authoritarian consolidations. Juventude Brasileira was an attempt by the state to forcefully manipulate youth into conforming to the regime's ideal of how the Brazilian of the future should behave and believe. The primary sources that underpin this article are largely the creations of education administrators, high-level government bureaucrats and ministers, and journalists—those whom Teun van Dijk (1993; 2009; 2011) calls “symbolic elites”, who through their privileged access to public discourse

have outsized influence in the reproduction of racism and other systems of domination. However, van Dijk (1993) argues, this influence can also be used to dismantle those systems of domination (pp. 19-20). In the back-and-forth of bureaucrats and educators struggling for power and influence in the Estado Novo authoritarian regime, discord can be seen. Their disunity perhaps created an opening for the subjects of their discourse, popular elements like students, youth organizers, and concerned families, to resist the imposition of fascistic ideology. The ultimate failure of this project, and its vanishing from the public memory of the Brazilian people despite mass participation at the time, provides an optimistic lesson from history for those who would oppose authoritarianism in education and beyond.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This usage originates with British Brazilianist Ernest Hambloch's 1936 history of Brazil *His Majesty The President of Brazil: A Study of Constitutional Brazil* (New York: EP Dutton, 1936), which argued that Vargas fit into the typically Latin American caudillo model which Hambloch contends had prevailed in Brazil since the end of the Empire.

<sup>2</sup> The only recent historical work on Juventude Brasileira, Aline de Almeida Hoche's "Juventude Brasileira: mobilização juvenil no Estado Novo (1940-1945)," *Revista Acesso Livre* 2, no. 2 (2014): 125-142, emphasizes that the organization's founding reflected international trends in the 1930s. In Britt Haas, *Fighting Authoritarianism: American Youth Activism in the 1930s* (New York: Empire State Editions, 2018), Haas explains that this trend extended even to liberal democracies, for example with the formation of youth divisions of political parties (like the Young Republicans) at this time.

<sup>3</sup> Popularized by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre in his 1933 bestseller *Casa-Grande & Senzala [Masters and Slaves]*, the concept of "racial democracy" contended that Brazil could lay claim to a racial and social *superiority* over monoethnic societies by virtue of being racially diverse and blended. The idea was adopted and celebrated by the Vargas regime and remains influential even today in Brazil.

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