

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

<http://dichp.bnportugal.pt/>



PRADO Júnior, Caio da Silva (São Paulo, Brazil, 1907 - 1990)

Born into a wealthy family of Portuguese origin established in São Paulo since the 18th century, he enjoyed a comfortable and stable life due to his origin and social position in the coffee aristocracy, which also had diversified investments in commerce, industry, and finance. His studies and schooling were provided by private tutors at the Jesuit college and in Eastbourne, England. In 1924 he entered the Law School of the University of São Paulo, where he took part in the student movement and the opposition to the political dictates of the Paulista Republican Party, both at state and national levels. At the end of the course, he toured countries in Europe and the Middle East. He supported the armed movement that brought Getúlio Vargas to the head of the government in October 1930, carrying out specific actions before and after the rebel uprising's victory. In 1931 he became involved in the class struggle, reading socialist authors and supporting the international communist movement. In 1933 he visited the Soviet Union with his wife, on his own initiative and with his own resources. For a short time he worked as a lawyer and enrolled in a doctoral programme at the Law School, but soon abandoned both those plans. In 1935 he enrolled in the History and Geography programme at the University of São Paulo (USP), an institution created the previous year. He was fluent in English and French, a skill that enabled him to get closer to the foreign professors, particularly French, who had been hired to establish higher education in the humanities: Claude Lévi-Strauss, Fernand Braudel, Pierre Monbeig, among others. The experience definitely marked his professional career and made him a critical intellectual who was active on the Brazilian political and cultural scene between 1930 and 1980. On two occasions he tried to join the university as a professor. The first one was in 1954, in a competition for the Chair of Political Economy at the Law School of the University of São Paulo. He was approved but not appointed to the institution's teaching staff. The second one was in 1969, after the dismissal of professors at the USP, when he applied for the chair of Brazilian History. This time the competition wasn't even held. His participation in the communist movement, from his youth until the end of his life, earned him arrests, persecution, censorship, and social and ideological restrictions. He was not ostentatious in his lifestyle, and the family's economic status allowed him to act with intellectual, material, and political independence. He was the author of 14 works in the areas of history, geography, travel, politics, economics, philosophy, and law. He was also a book and magazine editor. His books have been published in English and Spanish. In 1935 he was a militant in the Communist Party of Brazil (PCB) and leader of the *Aliança Nacional Libertadora* [National Liberation Alliance] in São Paulo, a multi-classist organisation fighting fascism that was chaired by Luiz Carlos Prestes. He was arrested that same year and then released in 1937, after which he travelled to Europe. He returned two years later, as a new war



DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

<http://dichp.bnportugal.pt/>

loomed. He was elected to the São Paulo Constituent Assembly in 1947. Persecuted in 1948, the Brazilian communists remained clandestine in national political life until 1985. In 1943 he created Editora Brasiliense, through which he published books by himself and national and foreign writers and social scientists. Caio Prado was one of the main supporters of the magazine *Fundamentos* [Fundamentals], which was founded in 1948 after the PCB's registration was cancelled. He created and edited *Revista Brasiliense* [Brazilian Magazine], an intellectual and political expression of nationalism that dissented from the official communist line and circulated regularly between 1955 and 1964, when it was closed down by the authors of the military coup. The publication of the book *A revolução brasileira* [The Brazilian Revolution] in 1966, containing a harsh criticism of the political behaviour of the nationalist and communist sectors before the military coup, earned the author notoriety, awards, and successive reissues. Under the military dictatorship (1964-1985), he lived in seclusion, aware of political and cultural debates in which he expressed clear and incisive opinions, which earned him another stint in prison and a brief stay in Chile in the 1970s. After getting back to Brazil, he returned to family life and his studies and his work at Editora Brasiliense. The illness would soon deprive him of the active participation in the political changes the country experienced in the 1980s. He died in 1990.

Caio Prado Júnior's historical studies are closely linked to his communist militancy. At the age of 26, the author published *Evolução política do Brasil* [Brazil's Political Evolution] in an edition financed by himself, with a restricted circulation, which generated feedback among critics in the newspapers and in political and intellectual circles. The innovative features of the work earned the historian the epithet of initiator of the interpretation of Brazilian history according to the methods of historical materialism. The pioneering spirit is coherent with the facts, with the exception of the sparse and generic articles and essays published by PCB activists in the 1920s, which are devoid of research and analytical rigour and confined to a small circle of readers. Divided into four chapters, the book provides a summary assessment of the distinctive features of Portuguese colonisation, the political turbulence started by the arrival of the royal family and the seat of the monarchy in its largest possession in the tropics, all under the aegis of the Revolution, and finally the imperial period in the 19th century until the proclamation of the Republic in 1889. Portuguese historiography is present in the first two chapters, with João Lúcio de Azevedo in *Épocas de Portugal económico* [Economic Epochs of Portugal], which provides interpretative guidelines for the periodisation of colonisation, alongside the three volumes of the commemorative work organised by Carlos Malheiros Dias, Ernesto de Vasconcelos, and Roque Gameiro—*História da colonização portuguesa do Brasil* [History of the Portuguese Colonisation of Brazil]—published in 1921, which provides information on the colonisation from the very beginning. The focus on Portuguese historians was due to two factors. The first was, of course, given by the thematic imposition of the study of Portuguese colonisation. The second came from the search for an aesthetic and intellectual renewal with an avant-garde orientation, which had been pulsating in Brazil since the 1920s. The aim was to rethink the Portuguese affiliation of Brazilian society and culture in the name of national identity and specificity. With this motivation and concern, the study of colonial formation remained in the historian's work, marking it definitively. The book favoured the understanding of the failure of popular rebellions in 19th-century Brazil, which is why half of its pages are devoted to the chapter entitled "A revolução" [The Revolution]. The chapter discusses the Porto revolution, the Brazilian independence revolution, and three major uprisings that had recognised popular participation and demands between 1831 and 1848: Cabanos, in Pará; Balaiada, in



Maranhão; and Praia, in Pernambuco. The causes of change and continuity in national political life and the prospects for radical social transformation of hierarchies and power structures were on the agenda of the debates held in the 1930s and 1940s in Brazil, under the impact of the 1930 revolution and the Estado Novo dictatorship (1937-1945), both under the leadership of Getúlio Vargas. The trips he made in 1941 to the interior of Minas Gerais, to the cities of the old mining areas, allowed him to see and record scenes from a past that, although not so remote, were enlightening about the functioning of the economic, social, and political order in the colony and empire of Brazil. Such scenes encompassed the urban and rural landscapes, the ethnic composition of the population, roads, working techniques, buildings, transport, food, equipment and utensils, cultural values, and everyday behaviours, residual or disappearing in areas as recently and rapidly urbanised as the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Caio Prado Júnior turned the photographic record into a research and documentation tool in his activities, perpetuated in various albums he organised about his work trips and field observations. Recent editions of his books have made it possible to access part of this documentation, with the reproduction of sets of photographs he took at different times during his professional career. Travel books, political diaries, collections of newspaper and magazine clippings completed the database of data and information—meticulously collected, ordered, and stored to support analyses in books and articles, arguments in conferences and interviews, and to sharpen the imagination in interpreting and proposing concrete solutions to national problems and conflicts. The book was reissued in 1946 and again in 1953, with the addition of nine essays on themes related to the title: *Evolução política do Brasil e outros estudos* [Brazil's political evolution and other studies]. The political dispute revolved around the nationalist nature of the economy and popular mobilisation in the campaign for a state oil monopoly and the creation of the energy companies Petrobrás and Eletrobrás during the second Vargas government (1951-1954). The book reappeared with an intention of contestation and social transformation, free from foreign capital and geared towards the needs of the autonomous development of the country. These will be the hallmarks of the author's political thought and action. He published his first travelogue, *URSS, um novo mundo* [USSR, a new world], in 1934. The book was the subject of conferences and debates and quickly reached a second edition, which was banned and seized by the police in 1935. In the 1940s and 1960s he wrote other commentaries on trips to socialist countries in Europe, Cuba, and China.

The continuity of his historical work came with his third book, *Formação do Brasil contemporâneo: colônia* [The formation of contemporary Brazil: a colony], published in 1942. At the time it was written, the work envisaged a thorough study up to the 20th century. This plan was not accomplished, and the work was limited to a single volume. It offers the reader an extensive analysis of various aspects of colonial life, more specifically its demographic, economic, and social aspects. There is also a change in perspective in comparison with his first book. In the former, the analytical emphasis was on the prospects for political change, while the latter is more about the permanence and persistence of the social and economic condition that dates back to three centuries of Portuguese rule. The situation was the result of the perseverance of the "sense of colonisation," the ordering of space, work, production, the circulation of goods and people, the administration to the dictates of the colonial yoke, the supply of highly profitable commodities on the European market, notably agricultural products and mineral extraction in tropical areas. The "sense of colonisation" was at the heart of the Brazilian economy and lasted throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. It was responsible for an economic dependence



on foreign markets, the need for high production rates and low technical qualifications, the brutal exploitation of labour, and the depletion of forest resources and arable land. These phenomena can be seen in all regions of Brazil and over the course of 400 years of occupation and systematic economic exploitation of natural wealth in this part of the world. Its essentially mercantile nature, the very soul of colonisation, was responsible for the short-sighted spirit, the lack of investment and technical refinement, and the intensive use of indigenous and African slaves from the 16th century onwards, and free labour at the turn of the 20th century, in the form of leases, partnerships, temporary work contracts, and salaried employment of impoverished European peasants and the labour of national migrants, particularly from the northeastern region of Brazil. The themes analysed in the book are organised into three parts. The first part is dedicated to the settlement and occupation of colonial space, human settlement, and the resulting composition of demographic contingents of three continents: Europe, Africa, and America. The second part deals with "material life" in the colonial areas, agricultural practices, livestock farming, extractivism, commerce, transport, and industry. The third part is dedicated to "Social Life," encompassing colonial administration and social relations. The parts into which the book is divided are preceded by an introductory chapter that highlights the modern "meaning of colonisation." Historian Fernando

A. Novais has captured the analytical movement contained in the book by warning that the "meaning of colonisation" is evoked in each one of the parts and chapters, methodically elucidating both the particularities of the object studied, due to its general dimension, and its pertinence, measured in the diversity of situations historically examined in the times, spaces, and social relations in force in the Portuguese colony in America. It is worth noting some unique features of this work—the most renowned by Caio Prado Júnior—in terms of the methods of analysis, sources, and documentation consulted. Legal sources were the most used by the author. Portuguese legislation, the ordinances of the Kingdom, inquisition records, royal charters, and decrees are the starting point for understanding the workings of colonisation. The use of documents of administrative origin is also abundant. These are *Atas da Câmara* [Minutes of the Chamber], memoirs and accounts of journeys by soldiers, missionaries, merchants, colonial authorities and administrators, mail, and quantitative data. This diverse universe of documents—massively printed and official—became nuclear in the book. Firstly, because of the São Paulo historian's familiarity with roles of a legal and administrative nature, given his training in law. Secondly, this was the type of document that prevailed in the compilations and editions of fairly representative samples, both qualitatively and quantitatively, and which were accessible in series organised and sponsored by cultural institutions in the first decades of the 20th century. The most recurring examples are *Anais da Biblioteca Nacional* [Annals of the National Library], *Catálogo das cartas régias, provisões, alvarás, avisos, portarias etc.* [Catalogue of royal letters, provisions, permits, notices, ordinances, etc.] from the National Archive, *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* [Magazine of the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute], *Documentos interessantes para a história e costumes de São Paulo* [Interesting documents on the history and customs of São Paulo] of the Archive of the State of São Paulo, and from the *Atas da Câmara da Vila de São Paulo* [Minutes of the Town Council of São Paulo] of the Public Municipal Archive. These collections, transcribed and printed, also included reports by national and foreign travellers, memoirs, instructions, and private, ecclesiastical, military, and government mail, as well as sparse and varied documentation. *Formação do Brasil contemporâneo* [Formation of Contemporary Brazil] was hailed by the



critique and well accepted by the readership and quickly and repeatedly reissued. The reviews and comments on the book are unanimous in emphasising its methodical originality without identifying or naming it. By making little use of the jargon, concepts, and analytical formulas of historical materialism, this book lost interest and diluted this identity in the face of seminal work *Evolução política do Brasil*. By promoting an articulation between regional specificities and the general meaning of modern colonisation, it was close to French regional geography, economic geography, and the historiographical practices of the magazine *Annales d'Histoire Économique et Sociale*. This original combination of methods and disciplines in the study of Brazilian history resulted in the classificatory confusion in the criticism of the book in the 1940s and after, with the exception of the analysis of Fernand Braudel, a former professor at the USP and a reader of Caio Prado Júnior. The author's motivation in *Formação do Brasil contemporâneo* was not dissimilar to the writing of his previous books: the aim of the political action of communists and the democratic segments in Brazil. The author's methodological perspective and analytical wit were geared towards a twofold purpose: on the one hand, to explain the relations of appropriation, use, and exploitation of land that prevailed in Brazil until the mid-20th century, and on the other hand, the repeated dependence of the colonial and national economy on the production of tropical commodities and minerals destined for the foreign market. The intellectual effort was aimed at better clarifying the paths and possibilities for the realisation of the agrarian and anti-imperialist revolution, which was proposed by the international communist movement until its dissolution in 1943 and which survived in the political imagination of PCB leaders and militants after that date. The specificities of Brazil's economic and social formation and, consequently, the strategies of political action that the author pointed out and defended, left him on a collision course with the successive party leaderships of the communists and their spokespeople until the civil-military coup in April 1964. The understanding of these historical specificities explains the intellectual interest and the editorial longevity that the book still enjoys today.

The economic and social analyses prevailed after the publication of *Formação do Brasil contemporâneo*, especially with *História Econômica do Brasil* [Economic History of Brazil] in 1945, the writing of the thesis *Diretrizes para uma política econômica brasileira* [Guidelines for an economic policy] for the aforementioned competition at the Law School in 1954, and the countless articles published in the *Revista Brasiliense* from 1955 onwards. In the 1950s, they divided their attention with epistemological studies that resulted in the publication of the books *Dialética do conhecimento* [Dialectics of Knowledge] in 1952, *Esboço dos fundamentos da teoria econômica* [Outline of the Foundations of Economic Theory] in 1957, and *Notas introdutórias à lógica dialética* [Introductory Notes to Dialectical Logic] in 1959. The studies he carried out persevered in outlining political action in search of a national project, planning, and state action to promote economic development based on Brazil's historical trajectory, as diagnosed in the research into the society born out of Portuguese colonisation. The publication of *História econômica do Brasil* complied with the request of the Mexican publisher Fondo de Cultura Económica and adapted the chapters and interpretations of the 1942 book to the purposes of the editorial theme. This was the second book of synthesis in Brazilian economic historiography, preceded by the two volumes by industrialist Roberto Simonsen, which were published in 1937 under the title *História econômica do Brasil (1500-1822)*. In the volume of his thesis on Brazilian economic policy, Caio Prado Júnior reaffirmed the assumptions of his historical analysis as indicative of the opportunities that were opening up for the reorganisation of the national economy in the context of the second post-war



period, the crumbling of the European colonial empires, and new challenges for the young African and Asian nations and the countries of Latin America, and the nationalist spirit that was pervading society and the direction of the Brazilian state. The confluence of these factors required, on the one hand, an understanding of the opportunities for change open to the nation's historical trajectory and future and, on the other hand, the definition of directions and measures to drive them forward and make them effective, based on the valuing of labour and the strengthening of domestic production and consumption. These were some of the "guidelines" used in the monograph written for the Law School competition. In *Esboço dos fundamentos da teoria econômica* [Outline of the foundations of economic theory], the author critically appraises the ways in which the economy is organised and the economic theories that conceive and explain them. This book closed the circle of analyses that involved the reality empirically observed in regional economic geography and in Brazilian history, the proposal of pragmatic solutions to the persistence of problems anchored in the colonial past and reinvigorated by the strength of imperialism, the theoretical basis that sought to consolidate the diagnosis formulated and the actions to induce social change in Brazil.

His research and political thinking also dealt extensively with the analysis of the agrarian matters. The mobilisation of poor, rural workers and small farmers in Brazil gained momentum after 1945. In the following decade, this emerged as an open social problem and conflict, with the organisation of trade unions and independent associations, especially in the northeastern states of the country. There, tenants of plots of land located next to large sugarcane plantations suffered the dispossession of their living conditions, labour, and rights to remain on the properties and were subjected to violent confrontations, the murder of rural leaders, persecution, and police repression. The communists' action was timid and *a posteriori* to the social movement. The political formulations of the peasant struggle and agrarian reform animated debates on the social situation in the countryside, the land structure, the character of labour relations, the place of small-scale agricultural production, and trade unions and political organisations, among other aspects. The author's participation in the debates resulted in the publication of five articles between March 1960 and January 1964 in *Revista Brasiliense*, later published as a book in 1979. In his articles, Caio Prado argued that there was a need to overcome the strong duality that characterised Brazil's land ownership structure: the omnipresence of large rural properties on the one hand and the scarcity of small properties with very small areas on the other. Between the two, there is a large mass of poor people in rural areas, gravitating towards temporary tenure, seasonal work in the fields, wage labour, and land renting. The author believed that the political attention of the communists should be focused on these social segments that were deprived of means, rights, and options.

Caio Prado Júnior was a founder and an active member of the Association of Brazilian Geographers (AGB), which was set up in 1934 and was simultaneous with the installation of the courses and the presence of the French professors of this discipline at the USP, Pierre Deffontaines and Pierre Monbeig. The magazine *Geografia* [Geography]—linked to the Association—was created the following year, with Caio Prado Júnior as an editor and regular contributor to the first issues. The two articles he wrote about the city of São Paulo belong to this period of his intellectual activity. One of these was published in *Geografia* [Geography], and both were later reproduced in *Evolução política do Brasil e outros estudos* [The political evolution of Brazil and other studies]. This magazine was a means of disseminating essays, research, fieldwork, reviews, and information gathered with the cooperation of members, students, teachers, military personnel, and other enthusiasts. AGB



has remained active and organised at a national level.

Active bibliography: PRADO Júnior, Caio. *Evolução política do Brasil e outros estudos*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2012; PRADO Júnior, Caio. *Formação do Brasil contemporâneo: colônia*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2011; PRADO Júnior, Caio. *A questão agrária no Brasil*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1979; PRADO Júnior, Caio. *História e Desenvolvimento*. São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1972; PRADO Júnior, Caio. *A revolução brasileira*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1966; PRADO Júnior, Caio. *O mundo do socialismo*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1962; PRADO Júnior, Caio. *Esboço dos fundamentos da teoria econômica*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1957; PRADO Júnior, Caio. *Diretrizes para uma política econômica brasileira*. São Paulo: Gráfica Urupês, 1954; PRADO Júnior, Caio. *História econômica do Brasil*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1945; PRADO Júnior, Caio. *URSS, um novo mundo*. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1934

Passive bibliography: D'INCAO, Maria Ângela (Org.). *História e ideal: ensaios sobre Caio Prado Júnior*. São Paulo: Brasiliense/Unesp/Secretaria de Estado da Cultura, 1989; BRAUDEL, Fernand. "Au Brésil: deux livres de Caio Prado". *Annales. Économies, sociétés, civilisations*, 1. Paris, 1948, pp. 99-103. ; IUMATTI, Paulo Teixeira. *Caio Prado Júnior: uma trajetória intelectual*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 2007; KAREPOVS, Dainis (Coord.). *Caio Prado Júnior: parlamentar paulista*. São Paulo: Assembleia Legislativa do Estado de São Paulo, 2003; MARTINEZ, Paulo Henrique. *A Dinâmica de um pensamento crítico: Caio Prado Júnior (1928-1935)*. São Paulo: Edusp/Fapesp, 2008; NOVAIS, Fernando A.. "Caio Prado Jr historiador", *Novos Estudos Cebrap*, 2(2), São Paulo: Cebrap, 1983, pp. 66-70; RÊGO, Rubem Murilo Leão. *Sentimento de Brasil: Caio Prado Júnior – continuidades e mudanças no desenvolvimento da sociedade brasileira*. Campinas: Unicamp, 2000. ; RICUPERO, Bernardo. *Caio Prado Júnior e a nacionalização do marxismo no Brasil*. São Paulo: Editora 34/Fapesp, 2000; SANTOS, Raimundo. *Caio Prado Júnior na cultura política brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: Mauad/Faperj, 2001; SECCO, Lincoln. *Caio Prado Júnior: o sentido da revolução*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2008.

Paulo Henrique Martinez

This work is financed by national funds through FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P, in the scope of the projects UIDB/04311/2020 and UIDP/04311/2020.



SUPPORTED BY:

