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Reseña de "Civilizing Rio: Reform and Resistance in a Brazilian City (1889-1930)" de Teresa A. Meade
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This book is an attempt to apply studies undertaken by George Rudé (The Crowd in History, 1730-1848) and Eric Hobsbawm regarding the behaviour of the crowd in France and England to the Brazilian context of the Old Republic. Being divided in six chapters the book deals with civilization (chapter 1), the features of urban life (2), sanitation and renovation (3), the resistance (4), living and working conditions (5) and the general strike of 1917. Chapter 1, Civilization, is a description of Rio’s development. Chapter 2 analysed the main characteristics of urban life. Chapter 3, sanitation and renovation, one of the best, is a detailed account of changes in the city around 1904, period of the urban renewal undertaken during Pereira Passos’ term as mayor (1902-1906), and the vaccination campaign carried out by health physician Oswaldo Cruz during the same period.

Another very well constructed chapter is the fourth, which under the name “the resistance” developed the 1904 revolt against vaccination in Rio. Here a detailed account of the destruction undertaken by the crowd was provided departing from a careful reading of Rio’s newspapers such as Jornal do Brasil and Jornal do Commercio. Chapter five on living and working conditions provided a careful account of children labour and the protests against raises in train ticket cost for suburban fares, the last sometimes resulting in riots. As the author tried to discuss housing conditions in Rio in this part, it could be enhanced with accounts of the subject such as the Master’s and PhD theses of Lilian Fessler Vaz from UFRJ-Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, as well as Francisco Carlos da Fonseca Elia’s MPhil on the subject. In this chapter, by pp. 143 Meade introduced other element in her analysis, the role and participation of women in the work force and the protests against the cost of life, fare increases and housing conditions, what becomes a constant criticism to previous accounts.
The chapter on the general strike of 1917 provided an interesting comparison with similar protest movements in São Paulo as well as the role and participation of women, according to Meade the very beginning of the general strike being a seamstresses’ strike in a sack factory on July 16 instead of previously accounts written by males who stated that the strike began with the walkout by furniture workers in the Syndicato dos Marceneiros e Artes Correlativas on July 18 (pp. 163-164). The conclusion is a criticism to the view that popular protests shall be seen as pre-political or pre-modern movements, a view constructed mainly by Eric Hobsbawm in a paper presented at a conference at UNICAMP-Universidade Estadual de Campinas in 1975. Meade’s research showed that the experience of popular protest in Rio’s Old Republic was, indeed, also a modern and political movement. It was also here that Meade reinforced her feminist criticism and pointed out the importance of movements beyond the workplace in the construction of citizenship rights. As a result of such an account, this book is worth a reading.

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