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Monday August 23rd 2010

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**Newsbook**

## American brothers

Aug 13th 2010, 11:31 by The Economist online | SÃO PAULO



OTHER Latin Americans think of Brazilians a bit like the rest of the world thinks of Americans: loud, flashy and rich. This is as it should be, because a strong argument can be made that Brazil is actually the United States—just disguised beneath a Carmen-Miranda-style fruit hat.

Sounds a stretch? Think of two continent-sized countries built on gold rushes and cowboys, on sugar and slaves. Think of the United States being the first country to recognise Brazilian independence. Above all, think of the two countries' topographies. Both consist basically of big cities on the coast where most of the people live; a vast, spectacularly beautiful and largely empty wonder of the natural world in the deep interior (the Rockies for America and the Amazon for Brazil); and, in between, endless savannahs where all the food grows. In either place, it's soybeans as far as the eye can see. Looking down from an airplane as it traverses the flyover states, you would be hard pressed to know whether you were crossing South Dakota or Goiás, Mato Grosso or the corn belt.

Perhaps Australia and Canada might say the same. So consider the people. Both the US and Brazil have similar collections of ethnic and racial groups. Each has big minorities of indigenous peoples, of blacks (because both had slavery until the second half of the 19th-century), and of immigrants from Italy, Germany and Asia (Chinese predominate in the US; Japanese in Brazil). São Paulo makes many of those hard-to-verify claims about itself: it is the largest Japanese city outside Japan, the largest Portuguese city outside Portugal, the largest Spanish city outside Spain and the largest Lebanese city outside Lebanon. In the same vein, New York is the world's second-largest Jewish city, its second-largest Italian city, and so on. Parts of Santa Catarina, in southern Brazil, still look and sound German, rather as parts of Cleveland used to. Even the largest ethnic groups are of comparable scale. In Brazil, people of Portuguese descent make up just over half the population. In the US, whites are just under two-thirds, and heading downwards.

Then think about the cities. Obviously São Paulo is New York—the commercial, industrial and financial capital; a city that never sleeps; a 24-hour traffic jam; a gaudy megacity that works; "an oceanic sprawl" (to quote Norman Gail of the city's Fernand Braudel Institute). Equally obviously, Brasília and Washington, DC are sisters under the skin; all boulevards which are too wide, public buildings which are too big, public spaces without grace and public life without liveliness. It's true that many invented capitals plonked in the middle of nowhere—which was true of Washington when the site was chosen—could say the same.

But less obviously think of a coastal city of blazing sunshine and hedonism; of beaches and beach culture; a city that helped define the 1960s and then began to sink backwards into its problems; a city, therefore, also of drug gangs and brutal police. Rio de Janeiro or Los Angeles? Well, both: cities of God and the Angels.

And, last, think of New Orleans on the Gulf coast and Salvador de Bahia, in Brazil's north-east. Both are the centres of black culture in their two countries. Both are the native places for some of the world's best music—jazz in New Orleans; tropicalismo, afoxé and caribé in Salvador. Both have huge, celebrated carnivals, notoriously corrupt local politics and famous local cuisines based on ground-up shellfish (gumbo and crayfish in the Big Easy, vatapá and shrimp in Bahia). Separated at birth, it seems.

Obviously, the list of dissimilarities would be as long as your arm, or as Brazil's

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coastline. But if this English blogger can be allowed one further indulgence, a big difference lies in the inheritance from the colonial power. Britain bequeathed to the United States a language; a legal system; a political elite (WASPs); a middle-class liking for commerce; a tradition of political liberalism (in the British sense); and a certain puritanical impulse. Portugal bequeathed Brazil the language and Catholicism. And that is about it. Brazil itself developed the rest. And it did so with something that most of the United States lacks: a Dionysian spirit, a happy sense that all the squalor and conflict will end—or at least be suspended—in a samba.

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**Doug Pascover** wrote: Aug 13th 2010 3:29 GMT  
Very fun post. Maybe full of it, but well written and enjoyable.

Tell me, where is Brazil's Yosemite, and who is Brazil's Yosemite Sam?

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**Crazy\_Bob** wrote: Aug 13th 2010 3:52 GMT  
brazilian girls are hotter

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**k.a.gardner** wrote: Aug 13th 2010 6:35 GMT  
This is a great event promo piece. May I?

Brazil Summit  
November 9th 2010  
Sheraton WTC São Paulo  
Avenida das Nações Unidas

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**D Brazilian** wrote: Aug 13th 2010 6:57 GMT  
True about Big cities.

Blacks in Brazil are not that minority.

Americans repeatedly say they are a republic, but in practice means they want to be ruled by an elite to protect what they call freedom. That elite wars non-Christian countries using that freedom as an excuse to keep its power of ruling the world.

Brazil is REALLY free, cause we do not like wars but would defend our territory. We are misguided by some politicians, but we are free.

And we have no enemies.

Considering this, and plus we are the only country that speaks Portuguese in the continent, make Brazil and USA more like what we say here since some decades ago: at most cousins.

The wise emerging and the dumb superpower.

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**BBL** wrote: Aug 14th 2010 2:13 GMT  
Well, nice superficial intent. However touching the last paragraph may be for a nationalist Brazilian, we have to consider the Portuguese left us a strong state apparatus when they came back to Lisbon after the fall of Napoleon and the rise of Oporto Liberal revolution. This apparatus permitted the elite concentrated in Rio de Janeiro to submit other regions and maintain the whole territory altogether. From the independence on Brazilians believe the state can solve any problem and lead any "revolution" necessary to keep the country's growth. Really very different from the States, not because we built a "new world", but rather because we struggle to maintain things the way they were and avoid any rapid change in social order.

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**zerge** wrote:

Aug 14th 2010 5:13 GMT

Loud and flashy, yes. But rich?  
Have you checked their macroeconomic stats?

[Recommend \(7\)](#)[Permalink](#)[Report abuse](#)**adair uk** wrote:

Aug 14th 2010 8:37 GMT

The author forgot the the process of colonization of Brazil was different form the other parts of the America, Brazil always was administrated by the Portugueses as a whole, as a colony Brazil was a Principality, them before the Congress of Vienna was formed the United kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and Algarve, so the king of Portugal had three votes. The independence of Brazil was pacific, and proclaimed by the heir to the Portuguese throne, at the time Prince Regent of the Brazil, Who became Emperor Pedro/Peter I of Brazil. For 77 years from 1822 to 1889 Brazil was a Constitutional Monarchy, much more liberal then other European monarchies, I think that the Republic was a mistake, if Brazil had chosen the Republic from the beginning, today we would have a minimum of ten Portuguese speaking countries in South America, we still having a imperial family divided in two branches, the Orleans and Bragance based in Petropolis, and Saxe-Co-burg and Bragance based in Vassouras, bot in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

[Recommend \(9\)](#)[Permalink](#)[Report abuse](#)**Chico Acioli** wrote:

Aug 15th 2010 2:07 GMT

This is a good article. But the most important similarity between Brazil (my country) and the USA is the imperialism: The evidence of this is the similarity between the borders. The two countries are very big. And both claimed natural reasons reasons for their imperialism. In the both discurses the geography was a point to defend the territorial imperialism.

[Recommend \(2\)](#)[Permalink](#)[Report abuse](#)**James AntiBr** wrote:

Aug 15th 2010 6:37 GMT

Interesting superficial comparison between the two countries.

The U.S. allowed its people to dream, thrive and prosper. Consequently, ideas, technology, and material gain were direct consequences of such freedom. Each wave of immigrants contributed to the U.S. as they found traction in their desires and aspirations that they could not find in their ancestral lands. Hence, people with little education or no University degree created technologies the whole world utilize such as Apple Computers, Oracle, and Microsoft. Blacks became CEOs (American Express) etc.

Brazil, on the other hand, is a land where the government and a few old money families have always excerpt power and kept the general populus under foot. The only sponsorship of creativity as a pseudo venture capital is the money the elites give Escolas de Samba for those huge floats you see in the Sambodromo during Carnaval. It keeps the mind of the folks occupied with fun and it is a nice way to avoid any true economic growth and competition emanating from the general populus.

The main difference between Brazil and the U.S. is the very world "Elite" . The "Elites" entails that they are somewhat better or above everyone else. That is an anathema to countless generations of immigrants to the United States who fled European tyranny in search of a place where their ideas, and personal economic growth could be realized. Brazilians, on the other hand, routinely kow tow to their "Elite" Masters in the same way Europeans long ago have kow tow to their kings and rulers.

[Recommend \(6\)](#)[Permalink](#)[Report abuse](#)**Sebastian Murphy** wrote:

Aug 15th 2010 8:45 GMT

An interesting piece in that it recognises the emerging power of Brazil. Similarities do indeed abound and the dissimilarities are not as great as one would imagine. A visit to Sao Paolo or Rio does invoke memories of New York in the late seventies and early eighties.

The key to understanding Brazil is the recognition of evolution and timing. Much of the enormous growth of the United States between the end of WW2 and the late 1990s had to do with the gentrification of its lower and marginalised classes. The white picket fence was a metaphor for decent housing, life insurance, mortgages and college educations. Unfortunately too much of the same thing eventually bites you on the ass. In the case of the USA, the 2000s saw the USA (and most of Western Europe)overplay an outdated economic strategy. An economic environment focused on home ownership and insurance based products for a population which already owns its own homes and has too many insurance based products, leads to a financial system based on speculation and complex self absorbing financial instruments.

That is all in front of Brazil. The country has the key factor of a massive marginalized urban population gagging to enter the financial system. Between Rio and Sao Paolo there are approximately 15 to 20m people ready, willing and able to become part of the economy proper. 15 to 20m people who dream of a mortgage, life insurance and a college education for their kids. Add to that its demographic profile - the population is growing and the average age is 28 (USA 36).

Compare Brazil and the United States. Highlight the similarities. But, be careful. There

is not much in common between Brazil and the USA in the year 2010. The closest one could one could claim is Brazil is a young USA.

It is all in front of Brazil.

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**James AntiBr** wrote: Aug 15th 2010 9:51 GMT  
@Sebastian Murphy

Perhaps you should revise your figures a bit.

1)Chicago growth from 1870 to 1910 was only recently surpassed by China. No other nation enjoyed such growth. The U.S. was a major power before 1914 and unlike Brazil challenged Europe in power before, between and after the world wars. Brazil with all its "Potential" was an agriculture based country during that period.

2)Brazil is only growing because of China, and not because of sound economic policies. Updatde yourself  
<http://blogs.ft.com/beyond-brics/2010/08/12/consumer-defaults-on-the-ris...>

<http://blogs.ft.com/economistsforum/2010/01/brazils-consumer-as-a-driver...>

3)The U.S. not only survived the Great Depression, but thrived after World War 2. Did Brazil?

The financial markets failed in the U.S. again, but the U.S. fundamentals are intact, and the country will continue to play a key role in the future. The desire for the U.S. demise is shortsighted and premature. It is still a 14 Trillion dollars economy versus 2 Trillion Brazilian one. Even by some calculations, Brazil will be 25% of U.S. economy by 2050.

Brazil fundamentals are flawed and skewed by the rise of China. It has more to do with Greece (a huge bloated State)than with the U.S. a country of innovation, ideas, technology and entrepreneurship. Even Dictator Chavez use Twitter. Certainly, you are not suggesting that Brazil will soon create an ubiquitous technology like the U.S., are you?

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**wipeout2097** wrote: Aug 15th 2010 11:56 GMT  
From the Article:

"Britain bequeathed to the United States a language; a legal system; a political elite (WASPs); a middle-class liking for commerce; a tradition of political liberalism (in the British sense); and a certain puritanical impulse. "

Nope, sorry. Current "United States" were not a British colony, only the 13(?) Eastern States. You conveniently forget about Spanish and French Statures. Then see this 2006 US census: (Scroll down to Ancestry)  
[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=D&-qr\\_name=A...](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=D&-qr_name=A...)  
Germans!

"Portugal bequeathed Brazil the language and Catholicism. And that is about it."  
Yes. Brazil kept it's unaccessible pristine forests and a native population a few notches below pure genocide

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**Sebastian Murphy** wrote: Aug 16th 2010 12:46 GMT  
James AntiBr,

Perhaps you should re-read what I wrote. In no instant did I question the phenomenal growth of the USA. Nor do I desire the demise of the US economy - quite the opposite.

You might better understand this subject if you take your knowledge of the history of the US economy, which appears to be above average, and examine the prevailing socio-economic conditions prevailing during growth periods and then attempt to see the similarities of those periods with the current environment in Brazil. That is what I wrote - no more and no less.

Maybe I misunderstood what you wrote, but reading between the lines, and judging by the defensive nature of what you wrote, it could be interpreted that you perceive growth and success in the Brazilian economy as bad news for the USA?

If the Brazilian economy enjoys exponential growth - dont take it personally. It could actually be good news for the US.

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**Joao Ribeiro** wrote: Aug 16th 2010 1:51 GMT  
Doug... the closest thing we have of a Yosemite Sam is the Nation figure on our money... you can see her face on the wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian\\_real](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_real) she symbols our entire nation and was used even in one MacDonald's commercial.  
Traditionally US is Brazil's first allie and mabe the repic is true... But being an allie doesnt mean to agree on everything...

[Permalink](#)[Report abuse](#)**James AntiBr** wrote: Aug 16th 2010 8:09 GMT

Sebastian Murphy wrote:  
 " Unfortunately too much of the same thing eventually bites you on the ass."

Isn't it some wishful thinking?

Brazil has always being touted the "Country of the Future."  
 Like Russia, it has confounded experts on why it isn't in a higher rank for what it has. The experts, like the author of the article, only scratched the surface superficially, and don't really understand what Brazil is all about. Everyone is salivating on a potential market, but only a few truly knows the potential pitfall. Most people outside Brazil don't even know who Garota de Ipanema was. To many she was a dark skinned beauty with dark hair.  
 What do people outside Brazil knows what goes inside?

I bet many would be repulsed by the Elite concept and how Brazilians treat Brazilians. There are many Ex-Pats living in Brazil and those who have worked there that know how wicked and vile the place is.

The U.S. has its problems, but it is a country that gives most people a chance. It also rebuild its enemies (Japan and Germany) something that a country like Brazil would not do.  
 was

[Recommend \(1\)](#)[Permalink](#)[Report abuse](#)**zaphodes** wrote: Aug 16th 2010 10:35 GMT  
 "Portugal bequeathed Brazil the language and Catholicism. And that is about it"

Sadly that list is not complete. The other thing that Brazil inherited was a suffocating bureaucracy. The labyrinthine procedures and the parasitical cartorios (notaries) are the main reasons that Brazil is so much poorer than the US and so much more corrupt.

[Recommend \(3\)](#)[Permalink](#)[Report abuse](#)**GuillermoMarraco** wrote: Aug 17th 2010 3:18 GMT  
 I should add that Argentina is turning into Brazil's Canada.

There are many similarities and differences: nobody is as rich as USA, and nobody is as friendly as Brazilians.

[Recommend \(4\)](#)[Permalink](#)[Report abuse](#)**Nicholas\_UBS** wrote: Aug 18th 2010 3:38 GMT  
 "The financial markets failed in the U.S. again, but the U.S. fundamentals are intact, and the country will continue to play a key role in the future. The desire for the U.S. demise is shortsighted and premature. It is still a 14 Trillion dollars economy versus 2 Trillion Brazilian one. Even by some calculations, Brazil will be 25% of U.S. economy by 2050."

Laugh, the fundamentals in the US are intact..sure James. Are you sure it's still a 14 trillion dollars economy? How about our "real" debt? And with real don't forget the unfunded liabilities. Take that, and you still believe we're a 14 trillion dollar?  
 Are read many of your comments about Brazil's economy and it's black population. Guess what..it isn't 50%. Brazil has many mixes (pardo's or mulatos) between white and black. Something here in the US they barely talk about...Obama drama is a great example or even beyonce. Another thing, Brazil does have wars experience (world war 2 in Italy is a great example, study it a bit). I also read a comment from you, where you typed that Brazil doesn't have big multinationals that aren't so popular compare to the Mexican..oh by the way did you know that Brazil has the third largest air manufacturing company in the world? What "mexican" car is being exported to Germany? LOL... It's better if you travel more to a nation before you to study type nonsense here about that nation,but somethings are correct when it comes to the "elite" and it's past. I have a question, why are you so obsessed with black ceo's? Are you black? So what, that their aren't any black ceo's in Brazil? Do you think Stanly o'neil was a great black ceo?

Anyway, great article..if NYC has the second largest Italian-American neighborhood..I'm not surprised that the largest is in Sao Paulo-Sp where the Italian community calls them self proudly Brazilians (from Italian ancestors)..hmmm..big difference how US citizens/Americans call them self here compare to in Brazil

[Recommend \(4\)](#)[Permalink](#)[Report abuse](#)**James AntiBr** wrote: Aug 18th 2010 6:36 GMT  
 @Nicolas\_UBS

U.S. Debt  
 The U.S. debt is indeed quite high thanks to a misguided Leftist stimulus package. Unlike Brazil, where votes are bought and sold, U.S. voters will make a correction in the upcoming elections. Even with a heavy debt, the U.S. continues to produce stuff the whole world consumes. Do you have an iPhone? Do you have a Facebook account? How about Okurt? Now, you didn't think that Okurt is Brazilian made, did you?

#### Afro Brazilians

Can you name even a "Pardo" CEO of a Major Brazilian family owned Company or a Private Bank? Wow! no racism when it comes to fun, but racism when it comes to PROMOTION!!!!

#### Brazil and War

World War 1 & 2 as well as the current NATO led war involved countries indirectly through alliances. Brazil, by siding with Iran and other pariah States may find itself in a hot war sometime in the future. No one could predict two world wars between 1910 and 1950. Between now and 2050, another major regional war or proxy war could develop.

#### Brazilian Industry

Embraer started out as a State Owned Enterprise, and the Brazilian government still holds a big stake. Whereas Modelo, Bimbo, Jumex, and the Mexican auto Mastretta MXT was all started by the private sector.

Brazil may have the natural resources, but it does not have the industry in the same level as its resources. It is still a third world embryonic industrial nation. China with a pittance of natural resources build its own auto industry (Geely, BYD) from scratch. So, don't be so PROUD about your little airplane.

#### Brazilian Elite

Just the word Elite entails that they are better or above the rest. That is not how Sweden or other Socialist nations operate. For that matter, neither is how capitalist countries like Taiwan, Singapore and the U.S. operate. There are wealthy folks, but they are not considered elites as in the Brazilian sense. There is real upward mobility in those places.

The Elite concept is a throwback from other eras, and just because Lula gave lots a people a stipend does not mean that century old habits have died out. It is still core to the Brazilian society, a stratified society.

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**bernajurema** wrote:

Aug 18th 2010 7:09 GMT

there is great book that was written comparing the colonization processes in the two countries. It's a great read, and very insightful. I'm not sure there is an English edition, but there should be one:

[http://openlibrary.org/books/OL6204133M/Bandeirantes\\_e\\_pioneiros](http://openlibrary.org/books/OL6204133M/Bandeirantes_e_pioneiros)

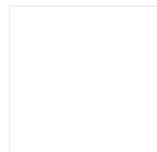
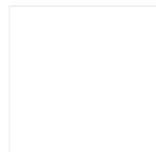
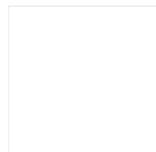
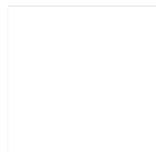
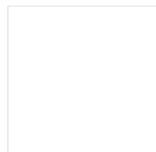
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