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## **U.S. –Brazil Cultural Relations during World War II**

“Our two countries could have a better relation after our marriage”

- “Showman” Rudy Vallee and Carmen Miranda in May 1941 during the *Royal Gelatin Program*

In the 1940s, many Americans started their day with a strong cup of Brazilian coffee and turned their radio dial to the Rudy Vallee Show to hear Carmen Miranda, “the-lady-with-the-tutti-frutti-hat”, sing *Chica Chica Boom Chic* and other lively sambas. Walt Disney’s animated films such as *Saludos Amigos* and *Three Caballeros* also gave American audiences entertaining vignettes of Brazilian society and culture. And among sophisticated audiences, Brazilian painter Candido Portinari was hailed as one of the most audacious artist of his time. But Americans weren’t the only ones being exposed to foreign customs, Brazilians too were becoming increasingly aware of American society and culture during this period. While Hollywood films, American popular music and Coca-Cola were becoming common features of Brazilian daily-life, Brazilians were also beginning to incorporate quintessential American mannerisms such as “thumbs up” and expressions like “OK”, “good night” and “I love you”. In short, Brazilians and Americans were well on their way to becoming close friends and allies.

This increased cultural exchange was not only a popular, and commercial phenomena, but also a concerted effort on behalf of both countries to use culture as a strategic foreign policy tool. Based on the premise that mutual understanding and goodwill leads to successful diplomacy, both governments, especially Franklin Roosevelt’s administration, allocated large amounts of resources to the expansion of culture and information abroad. Created in 1940 and led by Nelson Rockefeller, the Office for the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs

(OCIAA) was the main agency in the U.S. government in charge of crafting cultural policies. The OCIAA cultural programs were designed with two main goals in mind: to feed Brazilian audiences positive images of American society and, more importantly, to counteract Nazi propaganda in Brazil and the rest of Latin America. Meanwhile, in Brazil, Vargas created the Department of Information and Propaganda (DIP) in order to craft cultural policies designed to enhance the legitimacy of the *Estado Novo* regime both at home and abroad. The DIP also gave Getulio Vargas an opportunity to project an image of a modern and stable Brazil to audiences in the United States that were growing increasingly worried over the direction Brazil had taken since the rise of the *Estado Novo* dictatorship in 1937, particularly Vargas' flirtations with Nazi Germany. Although each country's cultural policies were designed to fit their own specific agendas, they did nevertheless manage bring the U.S. and Brazil closer together during the war. However such programs also provoked harsh reactions among influential groups in both countries, so much so that soon after the war ended, both governments were forced to abandon cultural activities all together.

### **Conflicting Dialogues: the Good Neighbor Policy and World War II**

President Franklin Roosevelt formulated the Good Neighbor Policy as an attempt to set U.S. - Latin American relations on a new and different path, away from the interventionist practices of the past and into an era of mutual respect and understanding. Roosevelt made his intentions clear when he promised to institute "a policy that is respectful of the rights of our good neighbors. Good Neighbors should comply with agreements and respect treaties."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in 1933, at the Pan-American conference in Montevideo, Secretary of State Cordell

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Peterson, J. Garry Clifford & Kenneth J. Hagan *American Foreign Policy – a history – since 1900* Lexington DC, Health and Company, 1983.

Hull assured his audience that “no state has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of any other nation.”<sup>2</sup>

However, by the late 1930s it had become clear that the war in Europe could potentially spill over to the Western Hemisphere and threaten U.S. national security interests. The U.S. government was faced with a hard choice: whether to honor the principles of non-intervention characterized by the Good Neighbor Policy, or act more assertively to neutralize the threat. Fearing that Japanese and German expatriates in Latin America made up a “fifth column”, the United States government reached into fifteen Latin American countries, seized more than 4,000 of these expatriates, and locked them up in internment camps in Texas.<sup>3</sup> Brazil, however, was not one these countries, despite the fact that it was home to a large number of Germans and Japanese alike. Strategically too important for the United States to risk losing it to the Germans as the result of American aggression, the U.S. was forced to find a different, less aggressive, way to deal with Brazil. Nevertheless, coercive methods such as spying and even military action were options that the United States government only abandoned in 1942, when Brazil joined the allies in the war against Nazi Germany.<sup>4</sup>

Given the relatively short distance between Northwest Africa and the Brazilian Northeastern coastline, the United States government needed the full support of the Brazilian government if it was to confront the Axis in North Africa and prevent the Nazis from invading the Western Hemisphere via Brazil.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, Northeastern Brazil became of

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Peterson, J. Garry Clifford & Kenneth J. Hagan *American Foreign Policy – a history – since 1900* Lexington DC, Health and Company, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Max Paul Friedman *Nazis and Good Neighbors : The United States campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II.* Cambridge University Press, UK 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Pedro Tota *O Imperialismo Sedutor: A Americanização do Brasil na época da Segunda Guerra* Companhia das Letras, 2000. Pp 179-181

<sup>5</sup> Moniz Bandeira *Presença dos Estados Unidos no Brasil: Dois Séculos de Historia Civilização Brasileira*, 1973. Pp. 270

great geo-strategic importance to the U.S Army. Proximity to Northern Africa, however, wasn't the only advantage or worry that Brazil had to offer. Brazil was also home to one of the world's richest deposits of iron ore, manganese, nickel, uranium, rubber and other strategic materials that were in great demand during this period as nations around the world built their armies for the war. Still, the Brazilian government was less than enthusiastic about granting the United States permission to establish military bases in the Northeast, or the prospect of entering into an exclusive commercial agreement with the U.S., especially since leading officials in the Brazilian government were more impressed with Germany's military prowess and economic vitality.<sup>6</sup>

With the military option virtually off the table, the United States government set out to persuade a reluctant President Getulio Vargas to cut off all ties with Nazi Germany and join the allied forces. Aside from showering the Brazilian government with generous loans, economic aid, favorable trade deals and armaments, FDR firmly believed that U.S. national security also depended on the government's ability to export American culture and information to Brazil. Consequently, the fact that many Brazilians harbored a negative opinion of the United States during this period made FDR's call for greater cultural exchange even more prescient. Americans were generally regarded as arrogant and aggressive peoples who looked down upon Brazil and the rest of Latin America. Additionally, many Brazilians believed Americans were culturally naïve, and a society that was marred in racial conflicts and driven by greedy capitalists.<sup>7</sup> Although widespread, anti-Americanism wasn't the only issue concerning the United States in the run up to World War. Politicians in Washington

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<sup>6</sup> Moniz Bandeira *Presença dos Estados Unidos no Brasil: Dois Séculos de História* Civilização Brasileira, 1973. Pp. 254

<sup>7</sup> Antonio Pedro Tota *O Imperialismo Sedutor: A Americanização do Brasil na época da Segunda Guerra* Companhia das Letras, 2000.

were also exceptionally nervous about the aggressive propaganda campaign mounted by Nazi Germany in Brazil and the rest of Latin America.

By the late 1930s, Germany and Japan had not only successfully banned all American movies and other cultural goods from entering their territory, they had also revolutionized the use of mass communication and launched media offensives that paralleled their military strength. Germany was actively promoting Nazi documentary films and building high-powered radio transmitters to broadcast Nazi programs to Brazil and the rest of Latin American.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the U.S. government feared that Nazi propaganda could potentially mobilize sympathizers in the German colonies in Southern Brazil as well as the Germanophiles inside the Brazilian government and military. Not surprisingly, when Washington finally set up the first official cultural exchange agency within the State Department in 1938, its activities were designed to offset Nazi propaganda in Brazil with positive images of American culture and the message of inter-American solidarity.

### **Nelson Rockefeller and the rise of the Office of Inter-American Affairs**

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, private foundations, businesses and missionaries were the main representatives of American cultural values in Brazil. Together with local organizations and state governments, American interlocutors such as The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, The Institute for International Education and The Rockefeller Foundation supported cultural and technical assistance programs in health care, education, and the arts.<sup>9</sup> These organizations provided the kind of constructive presence in Brazil that many in the U.S. government believed essential for successful diplomacy and U.S. national security. However,

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<sup>8</sup> Irwin F. Gellman *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Policies in Latin America, 1933 – 1945*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979. Pp. 146

<sup>9</sup> Irwin F. Gellman *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Policies in Latin America, 1933 – 1945*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979. Pp. 143

the stock market crash of 1929 and the depression that followed significantly weakened these institutions and, as a result, American presence in the region was greatly reduced. In effort to reinstate America's presence in Brazil, FDR and others pressed the U.S. government to be more directly involved in cultural expansion.

Although vehemently opposed by congress, in 1938 FDR finally managed to set up the first official cultural agency within the State Department. With the creation of Division of Cultural Relations (CR) policymakers began to craft cultural policies compatible with larger strategic foreign policy goals and American values such as free market, capitalism, consumerism, individualism, democracy and freedom. Despite the lack of political support in the Congress, and its limited budget of \$75,000 dollars, CR sponsored student and professional exchange programs, organized art exhibits, built American libraries and other cultural centers in Brazil. However, the full implementation of FDR's vision of effective, government led, cultural programs designed to counteract Nazi propaganda was only achieved with the creation of a new government agency headed by Nelson Rockefeller, an influential outsider, major campaign donor, and staunch supporter of FDR's strategic use of American culture.

In 1939, on a business trip to Latin America to oversee the operations of Standard Oil, Nelson Rockefeller became alarmed by the growing Nazi influence in the region. Unimpressed with the performance of the Division of Cultural Relations, he encouraged FDR to create an agency entirely dedicated to spreading pro-American information in Latin America, specifically Brazil. After battling Secretary of State Cordell Hull for months, FDR finally succeeded and, with an order from the Council of National Defense, the Office for Coordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics was

created in August of 1940.<sup>10</sup> To serve as director, FDR appointed his loyal friend Nelson Rockefeller. The name of the agency would change a few times over the years but, by the end of the war, it was known as the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA). And although the OCIAA had an initial budget of \$3.5 million dollars in 1940, once the U.S. officially entered the war, FDR tapped into the Presidential Emergency Fund and raised it to \$45 million, giving Rockefeller and his staff unprecedented amounts of resource and power to reshape America's cultural industries.<sup>11</sup>

According to Brazilian historian Antonio Pedro Tota, the OCIAA was tantamount to an "ideology factory" for the way Rockefeller and his staff carefully packaged and sold positive images of the United States to Brazil. Similarly, in an effort to reduce undue tension between the two countries, the OCIAA also worked to improve the way Brazilians (and other Latin Americans) were represented in the American media. Organized in three main divisions or sections - The Film Section, The Press Section, and The Radio Division - the OCIAA also supported various technical assistance programs, scholarly and artistic exchange, and supervised official visits by prominent intellectuals and celebrities.

In the 1930s, most American films shown abroad presented a hostile picture of the United States, emphasizing gangsterism, corruption and other negative aspects of American life, including racial tensions.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the characterization of Brazilians and other Latin Americans in most Hollywood movies also troubled the OCIAA. Usually depicted as lazy villains and other undesirables, the portrayal of Latin Americans in Hollywood during the

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<sup>10</sup> Irwin F. Gellman *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Policies in Latin America, 1933 – 1945*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979. Pp. 149

<sup>11</sup> Emily s Rosenberg *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* Hill and Wang, New York 1982. Pp. 202

<sup>12</sup> Antonio Pedro Tota *O Imperialismo Sedutor: A Americanização do Brasil na época da Segunda Guerra* Companhia das Letras, 2000.

1930s reinforced negative stereotypes and fostered resentment in the Americas. Moreover, American movies were also notorious for being culturally incoherent: Brazilians often spoke Spanish as opposed to Portuguese and sang Rumba instead of Samba. According to Antonio Pedro Tota, Hollywood's ignorance about Brazil and Latin America tended to unleash minor diplomatic storms.<sup>13</sup> Fearing that Hollywood's negative portrayal of American and Latin American societies could potentially worsen U.S. reputation in the Western Hemisphere, the Film Section set out to harness the seductive power of American movies to project a more favorable image of the United States and American culture in general.

In an effort to mitigate the effects of these negative portrayals and damaging confusions, the Film Section gained complete oversight of every American movie sent to Brazil. Even though the Film Section reserved the right to censor movies sent abroad, only a few were actually banned. The main effort was to convince the studios to be more patriotic in their depiction of American society and informed about Latin America. To this end, the Film Section effectively persuaded Hollywood studios to re-edit scenes that Latin American audiences might find objectionable. On one particular occasion, the producers of *Down Argentine Way*, a 1940 film directed by Irving Cummings starring Betty Grable and Carmen Miranda, spent an additional \$40,000 dollars to re-shoot scenes that the Film Section found distasteful.<sup>14</sup>

Rockefeller's personal relationships with movie executives in Hollywood greatly enhanced the effectiveness of The Film Section. Consequently, Hollywood studio were more willing to acquiesce to the OCIAA's various demands, which also included the casting of

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<sup>13</sup> Antonio Pedro Tota *O Imperialismo Sedutor: A Americanização do Brasil na época da Segunda Guerra* Companhia das Letras, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Emily s Rosenberg *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945*. Hill and Wang, New York 1982. Pp. 207



Latin American actors and the addition of scenes of famous sites in Rio de Janeiro and other parts of Latin American. The close relationship between Nelson Rockefeller and movie producers in Hollywood also paved the way for the rise of Carmen Miranda, the Portuguese-born singer and actress, who dazzled American audiences during the 1930s and 1940s with her unique and sensuous representation of Brazilian culture. Carmen Miranda went on to become not only the most popular Brazilian in the U.S., appearing in numerous Broadway musicals, Hollywood movies and radio shows, but also the highest paid female artist of her time.<sup>15</sup>

Another achievement of the Film Section was Rockefeller's ability to convince Walt Disney and his team of animators to go on a fact-finding trip to South America, including Brazil, with the intention of creating the first "Good Neighbor" movie. Disney's unwavering support for FDR's call for greater inter-American solidarity led to the creation of *Saludos Amigos* and *Three Caballeros* which starred a new Brazilian character, a green and yellow parrot called Ze Carioca, who became Donald Duck's loyal friend in his travels through Rio de Janeiro and Bahia. Moreover, the soundtrack to *Saludos Amigos* featured *Brazil* (Aquarela do Brasil), a samba by the famed Brazilian composer Ary Barroso, which, like the movie, became an immediate hit in the U.S. Carmen Miranda, Ze Carioca and other promoters of Brazilian culture in the U.S. during 1940s provided a warm and welcoming quality to FDR's Good Neighbor Policy.

The Film Section also produced newsreels and documentaries, both in Portuguese and English, to showcase Brazil's important contributions to the war effort. Filmed in 1943, the documentary *Brazil Quartz goes to War* shows how Brazilian minerals helped build airplanes

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<sup>15</sup> Daryl Williams *Culture Wars in Brazil: The first Vargas Regime, 1930-1945* Duke University Press, Durham & London 2001. Pp. 200

and radio transmitters used by the U.S. Air Force.<sup>16</sup> *Brazil gets the News* and *Brazil's Fishing Schools* along with other short films offered American audiences glimpses of a country that was both modern and rich in cultural tradition.<sup>17</sup> The Newsreel Section also hired well-known American directors such as John Ford and Orson Wells to make documentaries in Brazil to support OCIAA's mission. Although Wells' documentary film project was never finished, like most of the material coming out of the OCIAA's Film Section, *It's All True* gives viewers a generally positive impression of Brazil.

When Nelson Rockefeller tried to persuade the Associated Press and United Press to produce more Brazil and Latin America related news stories, AP and others declined his request on the basis that their readers were not interested in the region.<sup>18</sup> Aside from the lack of Brazil related material, most American news agencies shared Hollywood's stereotypical portrayal of Latin Americans as lazy, backwards and/or sexually charge individuals. In order to give American audiences a more accurate, if not favorable, treatment of Brazilian society and Vargas' administration, Rockefeller set up a Press Section within the OCIAA. One of the largest divisions of the OCIAA, the Press Section supplied wire services with news stories, photographs, cartoons and other relevant material.<sup>19</sup> Pressuring North American media outlets to be more fair and balanced in their reports on Brazil and the rest of Latin America was just as important for the Press Section as changing the reporting habits of Latin Americans themselves.

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<sup>16</sup> Antonio Pedro Tota *O Imperialismo Sedutor: A Americanização do Brasil na época da Segunda Guerra* Companhia das Letras, 2000. Pp. 68

<sup>17</sup> Antonio Pedro Tota *O Imperialismo Sedutor: A Americanização do Brasil na época da Segunda Guerra* Companhia das Letras, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Irwin F. Gellman *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Policies in Latin America, 1933 – 1945*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979. Pp. 151

<sup>19</sup> Antonio Pedro Tota *O Imperialismo Sedutor: A Americanização do Brasil na época da Segunda Guerra* Companhia das Letras, 2000. Pp. 60

Early in the war, only a handful of Latin American publications reported the successes of the allies or the activities of the U.S. State Department. Instead, headlines of Hitler and Mussolini dominated the front pages of most newspapers.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, the Press Section embarked on a campaign to persuade Brazilian magazines and newspapers to print pro-American stories and, as an incentive, the OCIAA offered subsidies to sympathetic publications. The Press Section also published its own magazine called *Em Guarda*, a Portuguese language publication, patterned after *Life Magazine* that was filled with stories about the allied forces as well as the Brazilian contributions to the war effort. *Seleções* was another popular OCIAA magazine which offered Portuguese translations of *The Reader's Digest*. *Seleções* also gave Brazilian readers access to articles from *The Nation*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Harpers* and many other liberal publications from the United States. *Em Guarda* and *Seleções* enjoyed a wide readership in Brazil, making them very attractive to American companies seeking to sell products like refrigerators, washing machines, blenders, Coca-Cola and cars to Brazilian consumers.<sup>21</sup> Advertising the advantages of the “American way of life” was an integral part of the OCIAA’s mission in Brazil. So much so, that companies that advertised on OCIAA publications were not only praised for their patriotism, but also rewarded with tax breaks.<sup>22</sup>

During World War II, many countries, including the United States, got involved in foreign language broadcasting and competed with each other to promote their programs abroad. In Brazil, the battle over the airwaves was waged between the U.S. and Germany.

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<sup>20</sup> Irwin F. Gellmen *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Policies in Latin America, 1933 – 1945*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979. Pp. 151

<sup>21</sup> Antonio Pedro Tota *O Imperialismo Sedutor: A Americanização do Brasil na época da Segunda Guerra* Companhia das Letras, 2000. Pp. 57

<sup>22</sup> Irwin F. Gellmen *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Policies in Latin America, 1933 – 1945*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979. Pp. 152

The Germans were in the lead in 1939, beaming over nine hours of programming a week.<sup>23</sup> Working closely with private commercial stations, the Radio Division of the OCIAA broadcasted official speeches, educational programs, music shows and news programs to Brazil and the rest of Latin America. Although private networks such as NBC and CBS were initially reluctant to join the government's effort to invest on international transmissions, Nelson Rockefeller's close ties with radio executives was instrumental in changing their minds. The partnership between the OCIAA, American broadcasters and eventually the DIP proved to be a highly productive one. By the end of 1941, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States surpassed German broadcasters and was beaming everything from news shows to music programs to Brazil around the clock. Brazilian listeners could hear shows like *As Nações Unidas Falam (the allied Nations Speak)*, *Estamos Em Guerra (We are at War)*, as well as Bob Ripley's *Believe it or Not* – all of which were either scripted or adapted by the OCIAA's Radio Division.<sup>24</sup> Aside from conveying an attractive image of American society, these programs emphasized America's military might, both material and moral, and its ability to defeat the Axis.

American audiences were also being exposed to Brazilian news and popular culture during the 1940s. NBC's evening broadcast called *News of the World* with co-hosts Drew Pearson and Bob Allen had a Latin News section dedicated almost entirely to Brazilian news and analysis. *News of the World* also featured prominent political figures, including Franklin Roosevelt, who on occasion sent warm and encouraging messages to Brazil, "our largest

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<sup>23</sup> Irwin F. Gellman *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Policies in Latin America, 1933 – 1945*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979. Pp. 152

<sup>24</sup> Antonio Pedro Tota *O Imperialismo Sedutor: A Americanização do Brasil na época da Segunda Guerra* Companhia das Letras, 2000. Pp. 77

neighbor that is standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States.”<sup>25</sup> Well-known Brazilian musicians such as Carmen Miranda, Ary Barroso and Heitor Villa-lobos were also regular guests on many American radio shows including the Rudy Vallee’s *Royal Gelatin Program*.

The OCIAA, or Rockefeller’s “ideology factory”, revolutionized the way the United States government managed cultural relations during World War II. In an effort to present Brazilian audiences a favorable view of American society, the OCIAA intervened in almost every aspect of cultural production including film, press and the radio. Designed to enhance inter-American solidarity and counteract Nazi propaganda, the activities of the OCIAA gave the United States a solid presence in Brazil. As intended, such programs had a deep impact on the habits and tastes of many Brazilians and, as we shall see in the latter part of this paper, some reacted positively while others did not.

### **The World of Tomorrow: Vargas, the DIP and the New York World’s Fair**

As the United States government extended its authority over the production of culture and information, both at home and abroad, in Brazil, Getulio Vargas staged an auto-coup that gave way to the authoritarian *Estado Novo* regime in 1937. Aside from shutting down congress and instituting a new strict constitution that gave him full control of the government, Vargas also set up the Department of Information and Propaganda (Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda or DIP). In charge of supervising the Press as well as all other aspects of cultural production in Brazil including cinema, theater and radio, Vargas created the DIP to consolidate the legitimacy of the *Estado Novo* regime both at home and abroad.

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<sup>25</sup> Antonio Pedro Tota *O Imperialismo Sedutor: A Americanização do Brasil na época da Segunda Guerra* Companhia das Letras, 2000. Pp. 108

Although by 1942 Brazil and the U.S. had become close allies, working together to neutralize the presence of Nazi Germany while promoting inter-American solidarity, Vargas' undemocratic rise to power in 1930 and again 1937 was deeply troubling to many politicians in Washington. Fearing that Vargas was well on his way to becoming a dictator, American politicians began to wonder whether or not Vargas was also veering his country towards fascism.<sup>26</sup> Cognizant that such questionable behavior could potentially jeopardize Brazil's commercial and political relations with the United States, Vargas worked with the DIP to improve Brazil's image in the United States. Working closely with Nelson Rockefeller, the OCIAA, as well as Brazil's commercial representatives in the U.S., the DIP accepted the invitation to participate at the New York World's Fair of 1939 entitled *The World of Tomorrow*.<sup>27</sup>

The New York World's Fair gave Vargas an opportunity to construct an idealized vision of Brazil as a progressive, stable and culturally sophisticated nation. To create such a modern image, Vargas and the DIP reached out to the founders of the Brazilian Modernist Movement. Organized by painter Emiliano Di Cavalcanti and poet Mário de Andrade, the 1922 Week of Modern Art in Sao Paulo (Semana de Arte Moderna) marked the start of *Modernismo*, or Brazilian Modernism. The movement brought together a number of young and talented painters, musicians, writers and architects seeking to introduce Brazilians to the latest international styles. Although vehemently opposed by the cultural establishment, namely the Brazilian Academy of Letters, which adhered strictly to academicism, under

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<sup>26</sup> Daryl Williams *Culture Wars in Brazil: The first Vargas Regime, 1930-1945* Duke University Press, Durham & London 2001. Pp. 198

<sup>27</sup> Daryl Williams *Culture Wars in Brazil: The first Vargas Regime, 1930-1945* Duke University Press, Durham & London 2001. Pp. 199

Vargas *Modernism* became the official cultural ideology of Brazil.<sup>28</sup> To build the Brazilian Pavilion at the New York World's Fair, the Brazilian government hired Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, two of best-known modern architects in Brazil at the time. The L-shaped, two-story pavilion had a flat roof, raised support columns, an entrance ramp, expansive glass windows and a surrounding garden designed to give audiences a rare sense that Brazil was both modern and tropical at the same time. Influenced by the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier, Costas and Niemeyer's temporary structure in New York introduced the world to Brazilian modernism, marking a significant departure from the colonial and neo-classical styles that had previously defined Brazilian architecture.

Inside the pavilion, murals painted by Candido Portinari further exposed American audiences to Brazil's modern artistic sensibilities. Widely acclaimed by most American critics, Portinari's murals depicted the regional and ethnic diversity of contemporary Brazilian society. According to Robert C. Smith, assistant director of the Hispanic Foundation at the Library of Congress, Portinari's work served as a mirror to the soul of Brazil. Smith believed that the three murals being shown at the World's Fair - *Jangadeiros*, *Baianas*, and *Gaúchos* - offered a "dignified image of Brazilian contemporary reality".<sup>29</sup> Portinari's success also guaranteed him a place at the Museum of Modern Art's exhibit titled *Art in our Time*. Inaugurated during the World's Fair, Portinari's painting called *Morro* was one of the main attractions at the MoMA in 1940. Aside from its modernist style, reminiscent of Pablo Picasso and Diego Rivera, American critics were drawn to *Morro*, and Portinari's work in general, because of his approach to race relations. Commenting on Portinari's non-stylized

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<sup>28</sup> Daryl Williams *Culture Wars in Brazil: The first Vargas Regime, 1930-1945* Duke University Press, Durham & London 2001.

<sup>29</sup> Daryl Williams *Culture Wars in Brazil: The first Vargas Regime, 1930-1945* Duke University Press, Durham & London 2001. Pp. 218

and humane treatment of Afro-Brazilians, art critic Florence Horn assessed that “the mulatto and the negro are indeed important elements in Brazil... [Portinari’s] paintings not only reveal his affectionate interest in them but also a gentle humor which can come only from a thorough understanding of their lives.”<sup>30</sup> Years before Gilberto Freyre’s *Master and Slave* became popular in the United States, Portinari had already begun to sow the seed in the American (and Brazilian) imagination that Brazilian society enjoyed a kind of racial democracy unparalleled in the Western Hemisphere. Brazil’s modernism, as well as its rich African cultural heritage, were also on full display at the pavilion’s café and restaurant. Among the musicians lined up to play there, Carmen Miranda and her band *Bando da Lua* were undoubtedly the most sought after by the public. Performing traditional sambas and choros with a modern twist, Carmen Miranda, who was already famous in Brazil, would in time also come to conquer American audiences with her unique interpretation of Afro-Brazilian culture.

Although Vargas embraced *Modernismo* and afro-Brazilian cultural traditions for mostly domestic reasons, the New York World’s Fair of 1939 presented him with an opportunity to export his vision of Brazil to the United States and beyond. On a fundamental level, Vargas sought to highlight Brazil’s incompatibility with the ideological underpinnings of Nazi Germany and thereby alleviate America’s reservations about the *Estado Novo*. Unlike the Nazi ideology of Aryan supremacy, and Hitler’s penchant for neo-classicism, the cultural ideology of the *Estado Novo* seemed to advocate pluralism, racial integration and modernism.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Daryl Williams *Culture Wars in Brazil: The first Vargas Regime, 1930-1945* Duke University Press, Durham & London 2001. Pp. 220

<sup>31</sup> In 1937, Nazi officials purged German museums of works the Party considered to be degenerate. Hundreds of these works were then chosen for a special exhibit called *Entartete Kunst*. Artists shown in the Degenerate Art exhibit included Klee, Kandinsky, Max-Ernst and other pioneers of modern and abstract art.



Shortly after the New York World's Fair ended, Brazil regained its place as the main exporter of coffee to the United States. But "Americas favorite drink" wasn't the only reasons why Brazil and United States came closer together in the 1940s. In July of 1941, the two countries reached an agreement that gave the U.S. government authority to operate Air Force and Naval Bases along the Brazilian Northeastern coastline. A few months later, Brazil broke off all political and commercial relations with Nazi-Germany, thereby channeling all exports of strategic materials such as rubber, quartz and iron ore to the United States. The Nazis responded by sinking Brazilian ships off the Atlantic, prompting Brazil to declare war on Germany in 1942. Finally between 1944 and 1945, Brazil sent over 25,000 soldiers from the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB) to join the allies in North Africa and Italy.<sup>32</sup> Relations between the OCIAA and the DIP also improved dramatically during this period, resulting in cosponsored productions of pro-allied war movies such as *The Battle for Rubber* and others.<sup>33</sup> The DIP also began to broadcast OCIAA programming during the regime's primetime radio show *Hora do Brasil* and even produced its own war-time propaganda, particularly posters and billboards.

### **Conclusion: Reception and Reaction**

By 1942, the OCIAA and the DIP had become full partners in the effort to promote inter-American cultural exchange and eradicate Nazi propaganda from the Western Hemisphere. However not everyone, either in the U.S. or in Brazil, approved of the governments' activities. In the United States, the governments' desire to blend cultural production and information with foreign policy goals drew a lot of negative attention from

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<sup>32</sup> Moniz Bandeira *Presença dos Estados Unidos no Brasil: Dois Séculos de Historia Civilização Brasileira*, 1973.

<sup>33</sup> Gerson Moura *Tio Sam chega ao Brasil: a penetração cultural Americana*. Sao Paulo, Brasil. 1984.

conservative republicans and isolationists in Congress. Concerned over the constitutionality of FDR's invasive cultural policies, congressmen and senators began to debate whether or not the government was in violation of the first amendment, particularly free speech. Predictably, as soon as the war ended, pressures to dismantle the OCIAA began to mount. In 1946 Congress finally shut down the OCIAA and cancelled funding to all U.S. government led cultural activities in Brazil and Latin America.

Although the OCIAA's was the first agency in the United States to seriously challenge the negative stereotypes associated with Brazil and Latin America in general, for most Brazilians it represented a cynical attempt by the U.S. government, and its heavily subsidized media and entertainment industries, to create new stereotypes that were more in tune with the contemporary political climate. The dismantling of the OCIAA immediately after the war ended confirmed the suspicion held by many Brazilians that America's new found interest in Brazil was more opportunistic than genuine. Moreover, many Brazilians felt that the sudden and overwhelming presence of American culture posed a direct threat to their national culture. One of the most abrasive public reactions to the supposed Americanization of Brazil occurred in July of 1940 during Carmen Miranda's first return visit to Brazil since her departure to Hollywood. Performing at the prestigious Casino da Urca, Rio's premier concert hall, Miranda's fans - many of them from the upper classes - were dismayed when their beloved Star greeted them in English. If speaking in English wasn't enough of an affront to her Brazilian cultural roots, Carmen Miranda went on to sing many of the songs that had made her popular in the United States, including *South American Way*, a half-samba, half-rumba, composition about South America's exotic and erotic charm.<sup>34</sup> Irritated by her apparent

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<sup>34</sup> McCann, Bryan *Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music in the Making of Modern Brazil*. Durham 2004. Pp. 148-150

uncritical acceptance of America's exaggerated, irrational and sexually charged vision of Brazilian culture, Carmen Miranda was booed off stage by her own fans.

The events at the Casino da Urca in Rio de Janeiro troubled Carmen Miranda for the rest of her life, in fact, she barely ever returned to visit Brazil as a result. But Carmen Miranda did return to the Casino da Urca one more time, and on that occasion she performed a new samba composed by Vicente Pavia and Luis Peixoto called *Disseram que Voltei Americanizada* (They say I returned Americanized). In essence, the new song mocked her fans for accusing her of becoming Americanized while simultaneously glorifying traditional Brazilian culture.

Carmen Miranda wasn't the only Brazilian whose popularity in the United States drew criticism from Brazilian audiences. Conservative and nationalist members of Brazilian society also accused painter Candido Portinari as well as modernist architects Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer of being un-Brazilian since their work drew on foreign influences. By looking at *Morro*, Portinari's picturesque rendition of a favela, which attracted so much attention in the United States, Americans were led to believe that favelas were both beautiful and modern. Portinari's critics in Brazil saw this as a deliberate and cynic attempt by the artist to misconstrue contemporary Brazilian reality in order to enhance the *Estado Novo* in the eyes of an otherwise uninformed audience.<sup>35</sup>

Brazilians also relied on parody and satire when dealing with the socio-cultural changes brought on by the so-called Americanization of Brazil. According to Bryan McCann, Chanchadas, or slapstick comedies of the 1940s, were essentially critical mockeries of "Hollywood self-importance and deliberately called attention to the insufficiencies of Brazil's

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<sup>35</sup> Daryl Williams *Culture Wars in Brazil: The first Vargas Regime, 1930-1945* Duke University Press, Durham & London 2001. Pp. 220

own cinema at this same period.”<sup>36</sup> The use of comedy and satire as a way to mitigate the impact of American culture was also prevalent in the popular music of the 1930s and 1940s. Like Carmen Miranda, many Brazilian musicians began to incorporate American styles and English words in creative and critical ways. Although conservative nationalists saw this Americanization as an affront to traditional Brazilian music, Bryan McCann argues that critical approaches to foreign influences may have actually diluted the threat of cultural imperialism.

Although the United States and the Brazilian governments dominated the production and dissemination of culture and information during World War II, each country was driven by specific political agendas. In the U.S., FDR and Nelson Rockefeller sought to counteract Nazi cultural penetration in Brazil by highlighting certain American cultural values and presenting a positive image of the United States. In Brazil, Vargas and the DIP were more concerned with consolidating the *Estado Novo* as a modern regime and the need to neutralize political opposition both at home and abroad. However, government led cultural exchange programs did not necessarily give those involved in the policymaking process a monopoly over the way it was received by the public. Reactions to the cultural programs of the 1940s varied greatly, some of which were entirely counterproductive from the standpoint of the U.S. government. Despite FDR’s and Nelson Rockefeller’s expectations, the fact that many Brazilians began to incorporate American culture and consumer products as part of their daily lives did not, in the end, make them any more sympathetic toward the United States.

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<sup>36</sup> McCann, Bryan *Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music in the Making of Modern Brazil*. Durham 2004. Pp. 144

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