Book Review


Reviewed by Débora Zamorano

_Envisioning Brazil_ is an innovative attempt to put different essays about diverse topics related to Brazilian studies and research in the academic area. It is a well written book whose objective is to gather an ample assessment of Brazilian studies in the United States, since its development. In this attempt the book explores surveys of various academic disciplines, provides contributions in the field from France and Great Britain and compares these contributions to the ones in the United States, through the inclusion of articles from different authors in the field. In this sense, the author achieves the proposed objective. The book is extremely comprehensive, offers a detailed historic background and clarifies the context of Brazilian studies in the United States. The book even offers the readers differences in literary style between Brazilian and American researchers in the field.

In order to better understand the thesis of the book, a brief highlight of its contents is necessary. The book starts with a much elaborated preface, which familiarizes the reader with its purpose and an overview of how this initiative started. The introduction outlines the main topics and articles included in the book. Part I concentrates on published books. Furthermore, it highlights research on Brazil in the Untied Stated. One of the interesting points the author makes is the difference between expectations among readers in the United States and in Brazil, which shows that Americans readers do not appreciate theory as much as Brazilian reads.

Part II gives a general idea of how Brazil is taught at American Universities. Although there are summer programs and other important programs, the frontline is still Portuguese-language programs. Part II also includes the analysis of the teaching of Portuguese in the United States and unfortunately shows Portuguese as taking up only a small place in the language teaching field. The author provides specific details for this fact, such as the prevalence of Spanish in American universities due to the vast Hispanic population living in the United States. The same detailed analysis includes the social
sciences and points out that the most extensive fieldwork is noted both in history and anthropology. Moreover, it includes essays about the influence of geography in Brazilian studies, which provide a detailed and accurate overview of the topic. This analysis explores the way geography focused on in the past, which was basically maps and regions, as opposed to the political problems that are also explored today. In Part III the author includes two essays that help put US contributions to Brazilian Studies into context. The essays are about Brazilian studies both in Great Britain and France. Both essays provide a meticulous historic context and as a result, make it easier for the reader to understand. Finally, in part 4, the book indicates bibliographic and reference sources, which are essential for researchers who delve into Brazilian studies.

As can be perceived from the summary above, the book’s main strength is giving evidence to the reader about the history of Brazilian studies in the United States, from its development until today. This evidence includes all the diverse areas of Brazilian studies such as history, art, music, and politics, among others. Another strength the book has is to put all the different studies into their historical context, which helps the reader, especially readers who are not directly related to the field of Brazilian studies research. In other words, Envisioning Brazil reaches its objective, which is to provide the readers with an overview about Brazilian studies.

Nevertheless, the book could have included more details about the teaching of Portuguese at American Universities, which is still the core of Portuguese language programs, according to the author. Therefore, the book could have included a more detailed explanation of curricula utilized, as well as some research results with assessment of Portuguese programs from the perspective of students, instructors and chairs of departments. As a result, these findings, added to the excellent and precise information would have provided a clearer picture of Brazilian studies, as far as Portuguese programs are concerned at American universities.

In summary, the book is highly recommended for anyone who researches about Brazil, due to its precise information, historical content, comparative analysis between Brazilians studying about Brazil and Americans studying about Brazil, contributions from France and Great Britain which help readers better understand the Brazilian mentality. In other words, it is clear for the readers that although Brazil and the United States belong to the
same hemisphere, Brazil has more to share with France, because they have the same line of thought. In addition, the book is highly recommendable due to its accurate and clarifying notes, as well as the three chapters it provides about bibliography and references in the field.