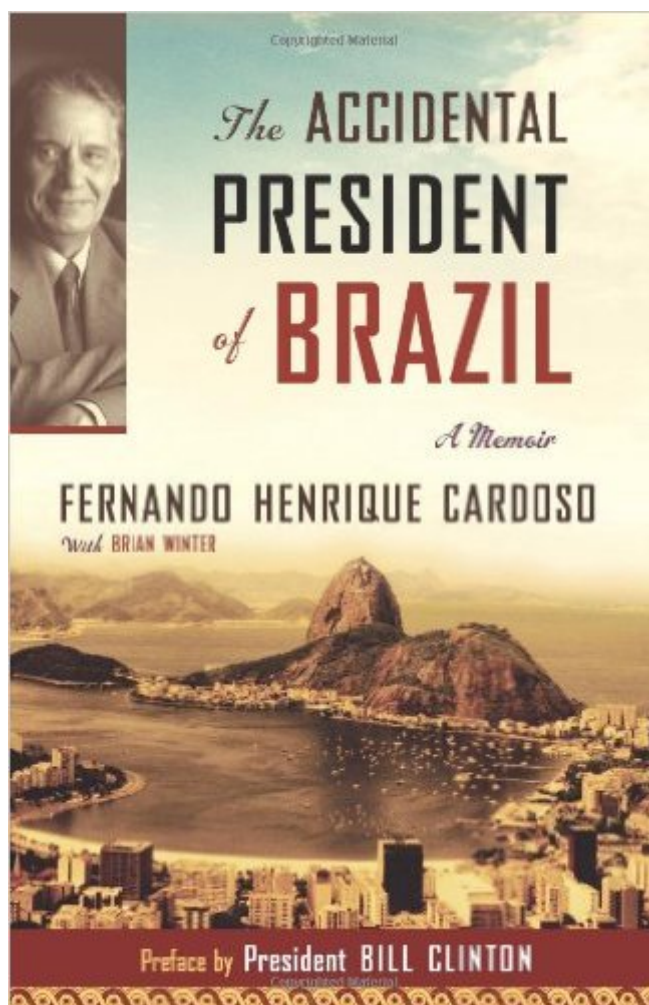


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The Accidental President Of Brazil: A Memoir



Synopsis

Fernando Henrique Cardoso received a phone call in the middle of the night asking him to be the new Finance Minister of Brazil. As he put the phone down and stared into the darkness of his hotel room, he feared he'd been handed a political death sentence. The year was 1993, and he would be responsible for an economy that had had seven different currencies in the previous eight years to cope with inflation that had run at 3000 percent a year. Brazil had a habit of chewing up finance ministers with the ferocity of an piranha. This was just one of the turns in a largely unscripted and sometimes unwanted political career. In exile during the harshest period of the junta that ruled Brazil for twenty years, Cardoso started his political life with a tentative run for the Federal Senate in 1978. Within fifteen years, and despite himself, this former sociologist was running the country. And what a country! Brazil, it is often said, is on the edge of modernity, striding with one foot in mid-air towards the future, the other still rooted deep in a traditional past. It is a land of sophisticated music and brutal gold-digging, of the next global superpower and the last old-time coffee plantations. It is gloriously ungovernable, irrepressibly attractive, and home to the family, friends and extraordinary life of Fernando Henrique Cardoso. This is his story and his love song to his country.

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Customer Reviews

In planning a trip to Brazil, I was looking for a readable history of Brazil's past 100 years to give me an understanding of the nation, its history, and its challenges. Fernando Henrique Cardoso's book appeared to be a perfect choice: it combines history, and social and economic analysis with a

personal biography of one of Brazil's finest presidents. Like most autobiographies, *The Accidental President of Brazil* is not an objective work. Cardoso does defend his policies and programs, especially his work in developing Brazil's modern currency--the Real. Cardoso, to his credit, did prove to be an effective inflation fighter who instilled some discipline into the samba economy of Brazil. He also strengthened the country as a democracy and won kudos from foreign leaders, the IMF, and the World Bank. However, Brazil's problems are far from over. Parts of its major cities--the notorious favelas--are ungovernable, and are giving the country a terrible reputation abroad. Poverty and unemployment, which go hand in hand with urban slums, also plague the country. Cardoso draws an interesting analogy between the favelas and the Bronx and Harlem, New York, in the 1970s. Harlem, he argues, looked ungovernable in 1975, but now it is a center of urban renewal and culture. President Clinton even has an office there. In short, if we take a long term view of the favela problem, he explains, positive change is a true possibility. After all, property within a stone's throw of Copacabana beach cannot be slum for ever. The inevitability of progress sounds like the positivist philosophy of Brazil's founders, and in fact, Mr. Cardoso's grandfather was one of a group of military officers who overthrew Emperor Dom Pedro II and founded the modern state.

This memoir of former Brazilian President, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, reeks of legacy-cementing, but is nonetheless an interesting and brief fly-by of Brazilian history and the country's emergence onto the global economic and political stage. The book, translated with the help of Brian Winter, is quite skinny on details. Only 280 pages, the book deals little with the realities that Cardoso inevitably faced in his stint as the leader of modern democracy: legislative battles, ideological compromises, political in-fighting, administrative setbacks. In Cardoso's recount of his Presidency, we are not afforded a look into the former President's heart as he waged these political battles. We are made unaware of any ideological compromises he may have had to make. We are only encouraged to believe that "if nothing else, Brazil's stability is an overwhelming sign that the ideas of [Cardoso's] government should endure." This may indeed be true, but it would be nice if the reader were allowed to draw this conclusion on their own based upon a fair presentation of the facts, rather than having Cardoso tell us this much. If you are looking for a detailed play-by-play of Cardoso's eight years in power, this book will prove disappointing (you will have to look to Cardoso's more extensive memoir written in Portuguese for that). Much more of the book is focused on the "Accidental" rather than the "President" part of the book's title. Cardoso provides a hearty background and detail of his family history, and how he went from child in a privileged Brazilian family to a Sociology Professor at the University of Sao Paulo to ultimately the President of Brazil.

Cardoso ultimately reduces his rise to power to little more than "luck and circumstance".

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