Historicizing the Failed Coup Attempt in Brazil

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On January 8, 2023, thousands of supporters of the former President Jair Bolsonaro stormed the Presidential Palace, Supreme Court, and Congress in Brazil's capital, Brasília.[1] Many people in Brazil recognized the attack as an attempt to inspire a military coup and labeled those involved *golpistas*, a term used to describe the people who carry out a coup.[2] The golpistas were trying to force the military to overturn the election of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the face of Brazil's progressive Worker's Party, who won a third presidential term in the 2022 election. Bolsonaro began spreading lies about Brazil's voting system and the election results even before he officially lost the election, leading many of his supporters to camp outside military bases for weeks before January 8.[3] Bolsonaro left Brazil for Florida without officially conceding defeat, and on the next day, January 1, President Lula, as he is popularly known, was inaugurated.[4]

The golpistas attempted to incite a military coup because of their hatred for Lula, their frustration with democracy, and their belief in Bolsonaro. The golpistas believed that a violent and chaotic attack on the capitol would force the military to restore Bolsonaro to power and oust President Lula.[5] On January 8, the golpistas pushed past police barricades and ransacked the mostly empty government buildings. They destroyed art, looted offices, and even lit fires while

[1] Daniel Modesto and Arizbeth Rojas, "Brazilian Students, Professors React to Jan. 8 Insurrection on Democracy in Brasília," *The Dartmouth,* January 24, 2023, https://www.thedartmouth.com/article/2023/01/brazilian-students-professors-react-to-jan-8-insurrection-on-democracy-in-braslia.
[2] Marc Hertzman, "History in Real Time" (PowerPoint Presentation, History 405, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL, January 25, 2023).
[3] Jack Nicas and André Spigariol, "Bolsonaro Supporters Lay Siege to Brazil's Capital," *The New York Times,* January 8, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/08/world/americas/brazil-election-protests-bolsonaro.html?searchResultPosition=12.
[4] Modesto and Rojas, "Brazilian Students."
[5] Phil Ciciora, "What Led to the Attempted Coup in Brazil, What Comes Next," *Illinois News Bureau,* January 19, 2023, https://news.illinois.edu/view/6367/1608468847.

waving flags of the current Brazilian Republic, which they were revolting against, and the Brazilian empire, which governed Brazil and upheld the institution of slavery during most of the nineteenth century. President Lula enacted an emergency decree, and by the evening of January 8, federal troops cleared the buildings and arrested hundreds of golpistas.[6]

In the days after January 8, many U.S. based news outlets made sense of the attempted coup by comparing it to the insurrection at the U.S. capitol on January 6, 2021. This comparison can be helpful and revealing in some ways, but it can also conceal many events in Brazilian history that inspired the attempted coup. Numerous commentators have explained the attempted coup in Brazil as originating from the capitol insurrection and argue that the insurrection is the principle historical precedent for the events in Brazil. *Time* reporter Philip Elliot, for example, writes that there were "more than a few echoes of America's darkest day for democracy" in Brazil on January 8. Based on the similarities between January 8 and January 6, Elliot argues that the attempted coup in Brazil is rooted in the storming of the American capitol in 2021. Elliot goes on to say that "it's tough to argue that this was impossible to predict. Bolsonaro refused to concede or attend Lula's inauguration, much as Trump refused to attend Joe Biden's festivities. Bolsonaro riled up his people with the same fervor as Trump . . . It was as if Brazil watched the Jan. 6 mob and copied it with impunity."[7] In an article for *ABC News*, Meredith Deliso also uses this comparison to claim that it was the U.S., not Brazilian political or historical actors, that had the most influence on the attempted coup in Brazil. She quotes a brief from the Soufan Center, which states, "Ironically, the United States, historically known for exporting democracy, is now associated with developing the playbook for dictators and strongmen to use to sow doubt about democratic elections, while simultaneously offering a blueprint for authoritarian leaders to seize

[6] Nicas and Spigariol, "Bolsonaro Supporters."
[7] Philip Elliot, "Brazil Attack Reveals Trump's Insurrections Strategy Is Now a Blueprint," *Time,* January 9, 2023, https://time.com/6245824/brazil-attack-trump-insurrection-strategy/.

power by force."[8] By characterizing the U.S. capitol insurrection as the nation's new political export, this quote reinforces the idea that the capitol insurrection offers the best explanation for the attempted coup. Finally, J.P. Carroll uses strikingly similar language: "just like the U.S. exported the belief in democratic values during the cold war, now, sadly, it is also showing the world how to challenge free and fair elections."[9] A deeper look into Brazilian history refutes not only the idea that the U.S. simply exported democracy during the Cold War, but also that the capitol insurrection is the main piece of historical context needed to explain the attempted coup in Brazil.

Other political commentators have reached further back into history to explain the attempted coup. For example, Yascha Mounk, a journalist for *The Atlantic,* writes that even though the two attacks were similar, January 8 was not "simply a matter of one would-be dictator imitating another." Instead, Mounk explains January 8 as the consequence of the rise in populism in democracies across the world in the past decade.[10] Kenichi Serino uses even more history to explain January 8 by beginning his explanation with the Brazilian military coup of 1964 that led to twenty-one years of dictatorship. Serino argues that Bolsonaro's nostalgia for the dictatorship incited the anti-democratic sentiments of January 8.[11] But even these attempts do not go far enough to reach a more complete understanding of the attempted coup on January 8, 2023.

The comparison between January 6 in the U.S. and January 8 in Brazil obscures two major themes of January 8 that allude to the influence of a deeper Brazilian history. The first is

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[8] Meredith Deliso, "Did the Jan. 6 Attack Lay the Blueprint for Brazil's Insurrection," *ABC News,* January 12, 2023, https://abcnews.go.com/International/jan-6-attack-lay-blueprint-brazils-insurrection/story?id=96312273.
[9] J.P. Carroll, "Brazil's Jan. 8 Is the Inevitable Consequence of Jan. 6," *The Hill*, January 11, 2023, https://thehill.com/opinion/international/3809040-brazils-jan-8-is-the-inevitable-consequence-of-jan-6/.
[10] Yascha Mounk, "Brazil's 'January 6 Moment' is a Warning," *The Atlantic*, January 9, 2023, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/01/brazil-jair-bolsonaro-lula-january-6-riot-populism/672678/.
[11] Kenichi Serino, "Here's What's Different About the Brazil Attack Compared to Jan. 6," *PBS News Hour*, January 11, 2023, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/what-the-attack-in-brazil-says-about-far-right-movements-around-the-world.

the role of the military and why the golpistas wanted the military to intervene. Second is the presence of Brazil's imperial flag and why this imperial symbol would be used in the attempted coup. A historical perspective is useful in explaining the deeper influences of January 8 because the Brazilian military's rhetoric and acts of enforced order, which began in the colonial era, have justified the suppression of supposedly disordered figures, communities, and political parties. This history shaped one of the ideas implicit in January 8 — that only the military could restore an orderly society. Furthermore, the fusing of national identity with White supremacy during Brazil's empire created a narrative that the golpistas could mobilize, in the form of the imperial flag, in favor of Bolsonaro and against recent political movements and progressive politicians like Lula. These two historical themes of January 8 force us to use more history in thinking about the attempted coup than the U.S. comparison allows. Therefore, the first step towards re-explaining the attempted coup is to understand Brazil's current political moment within the framework of democratic decay rather than a framework limited to Trump's influence, January 6, and a global rise in authoritarianism over the past decade.

The Rise of Authoritarianism

January 8 was not just a symptom of Bolsonaro mirroring Trump or a global rise in populism, but rather a reflection of deeper, substantive changes in Brazil's political environment. Since 2013, Brazil's political system has experienced what Tom Daly calls "democratic decay."[12] Daly defines democratic decay as "the incremental degradation of the structures and substance of liberal constitutional democracy," but the term "substance" is most helpful when trying to understand how democratic decay has led to the obvious authoritarianism in Brazil.[13] The

[12] Tom Daly, "Populism, Public Law, and Democratic Decay in Brazil: Understanding the Rise of Jair Bolsonaro," *Law and Ethics of Humans Rights Journal* (January 2019): 8-11.
[13] Daly, "Populism, Public Law, and Democratic Decay," 4.

substance of liberal constitutional democracy refers to "the norms of democratic governance, including public faith in democratic rule and the willingness of political actors to play by the rules of the game and to act in the public interest."[14] In Brazil, as faith in democracy fell to new lows, authoritarianism gained greater legitimacy. I will be defining authoritarianism as an anti-democratic system of politics with an institution or leader that is responsible for maintaining a social order and expelling threats to that order. Based on these understandings, the Free Fare Movement in 2013 was the first major degradation of the substance of Brazil's post-dictatorship democracy— i.e. democratic norms and faith in democracy— and step towards authoritarianism. This degradation continued with a recession in 2014, the *Lava Jato* scandal, the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, the 2018 election cycle, and finally, the attempted coup in 2023. January 8 represents the focal point of Brazil's democratic decay because of its inherent acceptance of authoritarianism and Bolsonaro and the military as authoritarian leaders. Through this framework, it becomes clear that democratic decay and the resulting rise in authoritarianism have shaped Brazil's current political context, rather than January 6 and the exportation of U.S. political dynamics to Brazil after 2021.

Daly's perspective is crucial to understanding January 8 because it adds more nuance to the discussion than explanations of the attempted coup that regard it as Bolsonaro's attempt to copy Donald Trump's political playbook or the monolithic rise of populism in democracies around the world. Daly argues that Brazil's political vulnerability predates Bolsonaro and Trump by citing Brazil's contentious political history, constitutional weaknesses, and even the political dominance of the Worker's Party in the 2000s. He also clarifies that the rise in authoritarianism

[14] Daly, "Populism, Public Law, and Democratic Decay," 5.

in Brazil has taken on a specific form that is unique to Brazil's historical context and cannot simply be lumped together with the likes of Hungary, Venezuela, or the United States.[15]

The first major example of declining faith in the post-dictatorship democracy took place in early June of 2013 when the left wing, non-party affiliated, Free Fare Movement coordinated a large public demonstration in São Paulo to protest the twenty-cent increase in public transportation fares. These protests quickly spread across the country and attracted over one million people in about two weeks. As the protests became more mainstream, they were co-opted by a wide range of seemingly opposed ideas and groups of people and devolved into mob demonstrations with the main goal of venting frustration. The Free Fare Movement became more about attacking the Worker's Party, President Rousseff, and the inefficiency of democratic government than addressing social inequality and problems with public institutions.[16] Trust in democracy eroded even further in 2014 as Brazil experienced its worst recession in history, and the Lava Jato scandal exposed corruption and bribery in many of Brazil's most important political parties.[17] The Lava Jato scandal directed public ire towards established parties, like the Worker's Party, and fueled the impeachment crisis that ousted Brazil's first female president.

The highly contested impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff was a major attack on the structures and substance of Brazilian democracy. Lula picked Rousseff as his successor and the new face of the Worker's Party near the end of his second term in office. She was elected President in 2010 and won a narrow victory for re-election in 2014. However, in 2015, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Eduardo Cunha, approved Rousseff's impeachment on the grounds that her administration manipulated budget accounts to cover up deficits.[18] Supporters of

[15] Daly, "Populism, Public Law, and Democratic Decay," 4-14.
[16] Alfredo Saad Filho, "The Mass Protests in Brazil in June-July 2013," *Global Research: Center for Research on Globalization,* July 14, 2014, https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-mass-protests-in-brazil-in-june-july-2013/5342736.
[17] Wendy Hunter and Timothy J. Power, "Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash," *Journal of Democracy* 30, no.1 (January 2019): 69-73, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0005.
[18] Daly, "Populism, Public Law, and Democratic Decay," 9-12.

Rousseff strongly rejected the impeachment process because the previous two presidents, who were charged with the same crimes, were never impeached. Rousseff's supporters also questioned the impeachment because Cunha and Michel Temer, Rousseff's Vice-President and replacement, were both convicted of corruption through the Lava Jato scandal.[19] This led critics to label the impeachment a "soft coup" because it was so polarized and did not follow the constitutional criteria for a "crime of responsibility."[20] The impeachment could be seen as an attempt to undermine the constitution and degrade the structure of democracy, but it is more aptly described as a degradation of the substance of democracy. A Datafolha poll from 2017, after Rousseff was ousted from office and Michel Temer had taken over, found that the approval rating for Temer was only 9%.[21] Even though Temer was not from the Worker's Party and seemed like a neutral replacement, he was not able to gain popular support. This shows how a large segment of the Brazilian populace did not just lose faith in Rousseff, but in the democratic system as a whole, no matter who was in the executive office.

Temer finished his term as caretaker President, and in 2018, Bolsonaro won the presidential election and weakened the state of democracy even more with his brand of authoritarian, anti-party politics.[22] Authoritarianism was thriving amidst democratic decay in 2018, when the percentage of people who said, "for people like me, it doesn't matter whether we have a democratic government or an authoritarian one" almost equaled the percentage of people who said, "democracy is preferable to any other system of government."[23] When Lula was inaugurated on January 1, 2023, it may have seemed like Brazilian democracy had survived a

[19] Marc Hertzman, "The Campaign to Impeach Brazil's President is Viscously Sexist," *The Cut,* April 22, 2016, https://www.thecut.com/2016/04/brazil-sexist-impeachment-campaign-dilma-rousseff.html.
[20] Daly, "Populism, Public Law, and Democratic Decay," 11-12.
[21] Daly, "Populism, Public Law, and Democratic Decay," 10.
[22] Daly, "Populism, Public Law, and Democratic Decay," 18-20.
[23] Hunter and Power, "Bolsonaro," 71-72.

decade of democratic crises, but the attempted coup on January 8 was the height of authoritarianism in Brazil's post-dictatorship era.

While Bolsonaro did misinform the public about the 2022 election in a very similar way to Trump, it was Brazil's decade of democratic decay that set the stage for the attempted coup because January 8 was largely contingent on the support for authoritarianism and feelings of hostility and mistrust towards the Worker's Party, Lula, and democracy that gained mainstream credibility in 2013. But democratic decay itself cannot fully explain the importance of the military on January 8 nor the presence and meaning of the imperial flag. Therefore, going deeper into the history of the military and the Brazilian empire is needed to fully understand the attempted coup.

Militarized Order

On January 8, the golpistas looked to the military as the only institution capable and willing to restore order to a Brazilian state that they believed had unjustly rejected Bolsonaro.[24] The military created this ethos of order beginning with the enforcement of slavery's racial system of exploitation that supported a White settler colonial society. Portugal established Brazil as a colony in the early 1500s, and as early as the 1530s, the colonial economy depended on the forced labor of enslaved Africans. The state's exertion of violence and control over the African population maintained this exploitative system and social hierarchy that subjugated the Black population while empowering White settlers. The colonial government believed the institution of slavery was so vital to the social and economic underpinnings of society that they used military force to crush any acts of resistance that could liberate enslaved people from the racial order of

[24] Nicas and Spigariol, "Bolsonaro Supporters."

exploitation.[25] Enslaved people in Brazil often chose to resist slavery by escaping to freedom and establishing communities of formerly enslaved peoples called *quilombos*. During the seventeenth century, colonial military forces in Brazil attacked these communities, most famously Palmares, in order to affirm the racial order of slavery and colonial society.[26]

Brazil declared its independence in 1822 with Emperor Pedro I at the helm of its monarchy, and officially abolished slavery in 1888 with the passage of the "Golden Law." During these transitions, the military remained the enforcer of an elite vision of social order, but beginning in the late 1800s, a new generation of military officers came to define order with their own positivist idea of national progress instead of traditional imperial ideology.[27] This resulted in the military overthrowing Emperor Pedro Ⅱ in 1889 and establishing Brazil's first republic with the slogan "order and progress" as moral justification.[28] Throughout history, this slogan would give the military an excuse and obligation to assert their own order in society whenever they felt it was necessary because it empowered them to determine what order and progress looked like and how to achieve it.

The military continued to intervene in politics whenever opposing political movements or figures disrupted their version of order, but it was the introduction of Cold War politics, U.S. interventionism, and the conservative fear of land reform in the second half of the twentieth century that proved to be the most fertile ground for the military's discourse of order. In 1961, João Goulart was elected president and called for progressive policies that would have upended the military's monopoly on power and order. The military and the C.I.A. used propaganda campaigns to demonize Goulart as a communist demagogue who threatened democracy by

[25] Thomas E. Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5-19.
[26] Marc Adam Hertzman and Flavio dos Santos Gomes, "Zumbi: The Last King of Palmares — Marc Adam Hertzman & Flavio dos Santos Gomez," TED-Ed, December 13, 2022, YouTube video, 5:26, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ckmXwx2n88.
[27] Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change,* 36-70.
[28] Jerry Dávila, *Dictatorships in South America* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 20-21.

denouncing militarized order. With the U.S. government's financial and diplomatic support, the military launched a coup in 1964, ousted Goulart, and established a dictatorship that lasted until 1985.[29] The dictatorship was an authoritarian regime that used a façade of democracy and economic progress to solidify their image as defenders of order. The dictatorship used congress, which they had already purged of political opponents, to preserve a false sense of democratic representation, and the unelected presidents went as far as wearing civilian clothes to posture themselves as democratic leaders.[30] The most politically repressive years of the dictatorship, beginning in 1968 with the passing of Institutional Act 5 and lasting until 1974, known as the "years of lead," coincided with the "economic miracle," which was a time of economic growth restricted to the upper and middle classes.[31] During the "years of lead," when it became clear that the dictatorship had no interest in safeguarding democracy, they substituted economic growth in place of democracy as proof of their protection of order.

The dictatorship characterized low-income Black communities as politically dissident to create the need for their enforcement of order and reinforce the racial order forged during the colonial era. This characterization was used as justification for extremely violent modes of repression and policing, such as specially trained "death squads." Even to this day, militarized police forces and military units criminalize low-income Black communities in the racialized "war on drug trafficking," thus constructing Black communities as agents of disorder, and the military as the ultimate arbitrator of order.[32]

In an attempt to prolong the life of the dictatorship amid political pressure, President Geisel, the fourth president that the military selected during the dictatorship, began a process of

[29]*The Day That Lasted 21 Years: How the U.S. Propped up a Latin American Dictatorship,* directed by Camilo Tavares (2012: Pragda), Kanopy.
[30] Dávila, *Dictatorships in South America*, 31-32, 137.
[31]Anthony W. Pereira, *Modern Brazil: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 53-55.
[32] Erika Robb Larkins, *The Spectacular Favela: Violence in Modern Brazil* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 57-68.

democratization in 1974.[33] The Brazilian Congress passed the Amnesty Law in 1979, which absolved political prisoners and military officials who engaged in torture of any criminal responsibility.[34] The Amnesty Law perpetuated the narrative of the military as the restorative body of order and democracy because it disguised their violations of human rights within the act of returning democracy to the civilian population.

Time and again, the military intervened in politics to instill its own sense of order onto a supposedly disordered Brazil. This history came to the fore when the golpistas expected the military to once again restore order to a Brazilian state that had, according to Jair Bolsonaro, fallen into the disarray of a fraudulent election. The history of the military and its institutionalization of order and disorder gives a more complex explanation of January 8 by showing that it was not just an attempt to replicate the U.S. insurrection, but rather an attempt to force the military to replicate the oppression and reactionary force that they have used since Brazil's colonial period.

Imperial Formations of White Supremacy and National Identity

Throughout much of Brazilian history, White supremacy has been used as a rallying point for national identity. This is important in understanding January 8 because the golpistas attempted to resurrect this formation of national identity to resist recent social movements in Brazil and politicians like Lula who support formations of national identity based on egalitarianism and equality. Understanding the goals and origins of recent egalitarian movements in Brazil reveals why certain historical narratives have been used as a reactionary platform in contemporary Brazil. For example, the film *Sementes: Mulheres Pretas no Poder* (Seeds: Black Women in

[33]Pereira, *Brazil: A Very Short Introduction,* 55.
[34] Thomas E. Skidmore and James Green, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 228.

Power) documents how Black women and the LGBTQ+ community have become more represented, more resistant, and more involved in Brazilian politics, but it also provides an entry point into understanding the meaning behind the imperial flag. The film begins in the aftermath of Marielle Franco's tragic murder in 2018. Marielle Franco was a Black lesbian activist and councilwoman from Rio de Janeiro who some believe was murdered by off duty police officers.[35] After her murder, a wave of Black women and LGBTQ+ political candidates formed a coalition to carry on her legacy and run for public office in the 2018 elections. These candidates created an extremely progressive and multi-cultural movement by speaking out for marginalized communities in the favelas, protesting the unjust murder of Franco, and supporting movements like #NotHim, a social media hashtag opposing Bolsonaro. In reaction to this political mobilization, Bolsonaro supporters escalated their sexist rhetoric and vandalized memorials of Marielle Franco. The elections ended positively for many Black female candidates, but at the inauguration, other politicians waved Brazil's imperial flag in response to the Black Lives Matter and Marielle Franco signs, harkening back to a time of extreme inequality when White supremacist narratives and systems embedded themselves in Brazil.[36] This flag would reappear on January 8 as part of the iconography of the coup.

The use of the imperial flag during the coup shows how influential the Brazilian empire's creation of a White supremacist national identity was to the golpistas on January 8. During the empire, popular narratives of White supremacy became integral to national identity and influenced future narratives even after the imperial era. In 1865, José de Alencar envisioned a

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[35] Antonio José Bacelar da Silva and Erika Robb Larkins, "the Bolsonaro Election, Antiblackness, and Changing Race Relations in Brazil," *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 24, no. 4 (2019): 906-907, 10.1111/jlca.12438.

[36] *Sementes: Mulheres Pretas no Poder,* directed by Júlia Mariano and Éthel Oliveira (2020; Estonia: Utopic Documentaries), https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/seeds-black-women-in-power-sementes-mulheres-pretas-no-poder.

future for Brazil based on White supremacy and genocide with his book *Iracema*. The book tells the story of a European colonizer and indigenous woman, Iracema, raising a child together who metaphorically represents the first "Brazilian." Iracema dies shortly after giving birth to her child, who she says is "born of [European] blood," thus predicting European domination in Brazil's racial identity in the coming generations and the erasure of indigenous history and representation.[37] Modesto Brocos's painting, *The Redemption of Ham,* from 1895, constructs a similar narrative by showing a Brazilian family becoming whiter with each generation.[38] Alencar and Brocos both proposed visions of assimilating Brazilian society into whiteness that would deliver the country to a future of White supremacy. This idea took root in Brazil, especially during the regime of Getúlio Vargas. In 1930, the military installed Getúlio Vargas as president, who claimed that Brazil had achieved racial harmony through the assimilation and acceptance of African culture.[39] However, this claim was based on the belief that African culture could not, or should not, exist separately from a White Brazilian identity and that the White Brazilian identity had an inherent power to adopt and erase African culture.

The Brazilian empire created a national identity based on White supremacy not only through the assimilation and erasure of other cultures, but also through the outright rejection and exclusion of African Brazilians and women from exercising the rights of citizenship. Since the imperial era, when the first elections were held, Brazilians with marginalized racial and gender identities have been systemically excluded from the polity. Voting was very restricted and indirect during the empire, but as abolition became more of a political reality, many restrictions on voting were dropped, except for a literacy test. This was designed to disenfranchise the voting

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[37] José de Alencar, *Iracema,* trans. Clifford E. Landers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 50-113.
[38] Modesto Brocos, *The Redemption of Ham,* 1895, oil on canvas, Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio De Janeiro, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Reden%C3%A7%C3%A3o.jpg.
[39] Paulina L. Alberto, *Terms of inclusion: Black Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 10-13.

ability of formerly enslaved people and secure a White, male majority of voters. In 1932, women were granted the right to vote, but the literacy test was not removed until 1985.[40]

The empire's exclusionary ideology and practices were never fully dismantled and have had a lasting impact on the criteria of belonging in Brazilian society. An 1890 immigration decree banned immigration from Asia and Africa but welcomed European immigration and incentivized landowners to facilitate this process.[41] Getúlio Vargas, the same man who celebrated racial harmony, deported Olga Benário, a Jewish communist prisoner, to Nazi Germany in 1936.[42] The deportation of Benário and cooperation with Nazi racial doctrine shows how the vision of Brazilian society and belonging was dependent on a certain White, male qualification. Even today, the criminalization of Black communities still relies on the logic of exclusion because Black communities that cannot be assimilated into the myth of racial harmony are rejected from a common sense of belonging and forced into a system of mass incarceration and over-policing.[43]

The presence of the imperial flag in Brasília on January 8 reveals the deeper history that took center stage at a time when progressive political movements were threatening a national identity built on White supremacy. The reliance on imperial symbolism gives us a clearer understanding of what January 8 was really about: a rejection of the increasing racial, sexual, and gender diversity in Brazil and an attempt to reassert that the privileges of Brazilian identity and belonging should only be extended to those who fit within the ideals of the empire's White supremacy.

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[40] Leslie Bethell, *Brazil: Essays on History and Politics* (London: University of London Press, 2018), 148-161.
[41] Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 136-144.
[42] Fernando Morais, *Olga,* trans. Ellen Watson (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 63-178.
[43] Larkins, *The Spectacular Favela,* 8-78.

Conclusion

The attempt to urge the military to reinstate Bolsonaro was the culmination of years of history being unleashed in a violent attack on democracy. Understanding the recent rise of authoritarianism and democratic decay, the military's rhetoric and construction of order, and the Brazilian empire's formation of national identity based on White supremacy is crucial to grasping the full implications of the attempted coup. Although there are similarities between January 8 in Brazil and January 6 in the United States, the history that was displayed on January 8 requires a new way of thinking about the attempted coup that does not rely on simple comparisons to the United States. Hopefully, this article can be a part of the growing discussion of January 8 and contribute to a deeper understanding that is grounded in the historical context of Brazil and the many complexities within it.

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