Discussion Questions (10/11)

Discussion Questions on Skidmore: (submitted by Pablo)

1. Skidmore makes frequent reference to the anti-government actions of the officials in the Catholic Church in Brazil. The Church went as far as having a combined Catholic-Jewish service for Vladimir Herzog, a stinging slap in the face to the military. Were these actions simply a convenient medium for the anti-government forces to operate outside of non-existent party systems? Posing a counter factual: if the Catholic Church had done nothing, or taken the side of the military (as it did in Argentina) would it have been as influential as it was by opposing the military?

2. Skidmore discusses the economic problems that faced the military government, especially those addressed by economist Delfim Neto. When an economy is experiencing 120% inflation is there anything that could have been done? Could a civilian government have done what Neto did to fight against the inflation and balance of payment problems (however successful or unsuccessful his solutions may have been). Would a democratic government have experienced the same growth and thus the inflation that Brazil experienced during this time period? Which is the more important aspect of the Brazilian economy under military rule, high growth or high inflation?

3. Skidmore argues that it was the moderation of both the opposition and the military that enabled a relatively smooth transition from military government to democracy. Is this moderation a product of Brazil? Was the military influenced by a history of various poder moderadores and hoped to act in the same vein? Did Brazil's history of military, quasi-military, and monarchical rule make the military government more tolerable to the opposition?

Discussion Questions on Keck: (submitted by Manasi)

1. How would you evaluate the extent to which the labour movement, i.e., the ‘New Unionism’ transformed the political environment in which labor organizes and was able to initiate changes for its future, independent of the state, during the last decade of military rule?

2. The success of the ‘new unionism’ relied on the movement’s ability to work within the existing democratic mechanisms and labor structures. Moreover, there was an increase in the level of organization within the union (“…greater emphasis on rank-and-file-organization, promoted contact between union leadership and rank and file.”) (Pg 260). Are we able to draw parallels between the labor movement changes and the institutionalization of President Lula’s modern day PT party? Are there lessons to be learned from the labor movement with regard to political bargaining and global approaches to solving labor problems for Brazil in the 21st century?

3. What are the larger social implications of the development of the practice of direct bargaining? The ‘democratization’ of the labor structure inherently opposes Brazilian
political-cultural values of ‘consensus’ and ‘solidarity’ by allowing for the existence of legitimate conflict. What are the implications of such a conflict on Brazil’s social structure and is there a way/need to work around it?

Discussion Questions on Campello de Souza: (submitted by James)

1. On page 382 the author writes: “The most probable outcome is that, rather than dying a sudden decapitation, the Brazilian democratization effort will slowly be debilitated by the suffocating weight of the military’s presence.” At numerous points in the chapter the author also mentions that the New Republic was established on the institutional foundations of the authoritarian regime, allowing for most of the political elites and administrative personnel of the former regime to remain in control of the country’s political course. Was there a realistic expectation for governmental change and democratization when the new government was led by the leaders of the previous regime? How did the lack of change in political leadership affect the prospect of direct popular participation?

2. The author discusses the important role of political parties in a democracy. She also describes the average Brazilian voter as incapable of articulating a view of the socio-political universe in terms of specific problems due to the failure of national political parties to fulfill their proper function. What is the importance of party identification in a democratic system? What role did the state play in suppressing the formation of political parties?