

Preface

THIS BOOK DEALS WITH ONE of the most important new social movements in contemporary Latin America: Brazil's Landless Workers Movement, or MST. But in discussing this movement, we are in truth referring to something much bigger than any single organization: the MST's rapid development speaks to the urgent need in Brazil to find an alternative system of politics, a different way of organizing the fight for the "right to have rights." Brazilians' search for—and belief in—such an alternative system is also the subject of this book.

We began to work on this project together in the summer of 2000, when we met at an international rural sociology conference in Rio de Janeiro, but both of us had studied Brazil and the MST for many years. We agreed to work together because we share a love for Brazil, and because we believe that the rise of MST is a phenomenal story, one that needs to be told in some detail to people interested in hunger, social change, poverty, environmental conservation and Latin America.

Wendy was first introduced to the movement in 1993, when she took a year off from college to volunteer as a construction worker on an MST settlement in the northeastern state of Sergipe. Despite some initial language difficulties, she learned enough to realize that the MST was an important movement fighting for social change in Brazil. She

entered the doctoral program in the Department of Geography at the University of California at Berkeley in 1995, intending to study the MST further. In 1997, Wendy spent seven months in São Paulo on a Social Science Research Council Pre-Dissertation Fellowship. She studied at the University of São Paulo with Professors José Eli da Veiga (economics) and Ariovaldo Umbelino (geography) and spent three days a week working in the MST's national headquarters, located in the city. During that time, Wendy was able to examine the movement's archives and meet with important movement members and leaders. In 1998, Wendy returned to Brazil for fourteen months of field research, during which time she conducted over 200 interviews in Santa Catarina and Pernambuco (see <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/DissPropWorkshop> for comments on that field experience). Wendy earned her PhD in 2001, and began work that year as an assistant professor in the Geography Department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She continues to work on the MST as well as more broadly on developing research on geographies of resistance.

Angus began his study of Brazilian history as an undergraduate at the University of Kansas, and continued at Cornell and the University of Michigan, where he earned a PhD in Latin American history in 1976. He spent 1970–1971 in Brazil, doing research for his dissertation on the social and environmental problems created by plantation export agriculture in southern Bahia. In 1991 and 1992, he worked in the same region, analyzing the problems of biological conservation as they related to the regional economy. It was in Bahia that he first encountered organizations of landless people working for agrarian reform. In the year 2000, he began work on this book, making four research trips to Brazil over a two-year period. Angus has taught environmental studies at California State University, Sacramento, since 1972 and is the author of *The Death of Ramón González: The Modern Agricultural Dilemma* (University of Texas Press, 1990).

Most of the information from field studies carried out for this book was collected at different times over a period of three years. Wendy worked in settlements in the southern state of Santa Catarina and the northeastern state of Pernambuco. She interviewed MST settlers, MST leaders, large farmers, rural workers, urban residents and government

officials. Because of the agreement she made with the people she interviewed, the names of Wendy's informants—with the exception of very high-profile movement leaders—have been changed to preserve their owners' anonymity. Angus worked in settlements in the southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul, the northern state of Pará and the north-eastern states of Bahia and Pernambuco. He also interviewed MST settlers and MST leaders. The names of Angus's informants have not been changed or obscured, except in certain sensitive instances. The quotes in the book, from the people we interviewed, were either taped or reconstructed from field notes.

We have many people to thank for their assistance in writing this book. First of all, we wish to thank those people in the MST who were always extraordinarily gracious about giving up their valuable time to help us find information and talk with us about their experiences. This book is *for* them as much as it is *about* them. We also learned a great deal about the MST and the situation in Brazil from colleagues both in Brazil and in the United States. We would particularly like to thank Bernardo Fernandes Mançano for the work he has done on the movement and for providing us with helpful comments during a visit to the United States in 2001. Tamara Benakouche, Maria Ignez Silveira Paulilo, Mana, Valéria Gonçalves, Peter May, John Wilkinson and the Araújo family were all invaluable sources of information and friendship for Wendy. José Augusto Pádua, Rosineide Bentes da Silva, Keith Alger, Cristina Alves and Salvador Trevizan each deserve our thanks for many forms of assistance. The project would not have been possible without their help.

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