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Brazil in the World

Next only to the worst destroyers of the earth's climate slowing their destructive activities, one of the best steps that could be taken for this planet might be for the destroyers of the Amazon rain forests to knock it off. They're led by one of the world's leading buffoonish fascist demagogues, who goes by the name Bolsonaro. His leading opponent in Brazilian politics is the man against whom all criminal charges were just dropped — criminal charges that were ginned up in a criminal enterprise masquerading as a crusade for justice. His name is Lula.

I wish political movements could overcome the need for single celebrity leaders who've spent decades developing name recognition and compromising with oligarchs. I wish when the people of Arizona overwhelmingly want a higher minimum wage, they could just vote for it instead of waiting years and then choosing between some horrendous plutocrat and a woman who physically cannot contain her glee at denying most of the people she "represents" their wishes. But I don't usually get stuff just by wishing for it, and we'd all be better off if Lula gives Bolsonaro the boot next year.

Some great background on what's happened in Brazil in recent years can be found in Glenn Greenwald's new book, *Securing Democracy: My Fight for Press Freedom and Justice in Bolsonaro's Brazil*. This is not just a cogent summary and analysis of public events, but also an inside report of how some of those events came to be. Brazilians do not, of course, have direct democracy, but taking "democracy" to mean some semblance of representative government, somewhat open and credible elections, the rudiments of a balance of independent and accountable powers, and respect for political rights, including freedom of speech and of the press, Brazil has democracy more securely now than it did a

few years ago, in no small part because of the work of Greenwald and his colleagues recounted in this book, work also principally responsible for freeing Lula from prison.

Sérgio Moro was a judge who began a major anti-corruption effort in 2014 that grew with Moro's press coverage and ego, and convicted Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2017, opening the door to Bolsonaro, who turned around and made Moro his super-empowered top law-enforcement official. Greenwald, originally from the United States, had lived in Brazil for years, had broken the Edward Snowden stories, and had been widely appreciated by the Brazilian government and media for revealing U.S. government spying on the government of Brazil. But in 2019, Greenwald got his hands on another massive pile of documents that a government didn't want anybody to see, and this time it was the Brazilian government.

Greenwald recounts how he got the files, what he did to verify them, what he did to minimize risks, and what he did to maximize impact — all of which I expect should be taught more in every journalism school, perhaps bumping a bit of time from classes on how to interview royalty or how to gain access to top officials (if those are separate from each other). Greenwald and his colleagues at The Intercept and other media outlets they partnered with revealed that Moro, the public face of integrity and justice, had been secretly and illegally working with prosecutors to railroad victims of his “anti-corruption” project known as Operation Carwash. Those victims included Lula.

The prosecution of Lula and rightwing hatred of Lula may have been driven by his significant success. The United States hasn't seen something like this in my lifetime, but it does happen. When Lula was in charge, the poor got richer, better educated, healthier, and happier. The example inspired / terrified people in other countries, as well as within Brazil. Lula was term-limited out in 2010 with an approval rating around 90%. He picked a successor, and she was impeached for corruption by far more corrupt cynics. Lula was expected to return, until Operation Carwash happened.

When it happened, it looked like an anti-corruption probe. Even Greenwald recounts that he was pleased at the unusual spectacle (for anyone from the United States) of seeing powerful people held to the rule of law. His book is a personal account, an insight into Brazilian culture, and a watergate drama all-in-one. Greenwald became the most hated and threatened target of Bolsonaro's thugs and trolls — about whom perhaps the most revealing fact is that, when Moro finally quit and accused Bolsonaro of various crimes, they started using Greenwald's reporting to turn Moro into their new enemy #1.

A not entirely unrelated phenomenon exists, I suspect, in certain minds that appreciated Greenwald's reporting on U.S. misdeeds when Bush was president, and perhaps even

somewhat when Obama was, but believed that blogging about misdeeds by Joe Biden — during an election for Jesus' sake! — was taking it all just a little too far. Well, maybe so, but I don't think so. I've disagreed with numerous positions taken by Greenwald, but none that I found in this book, which I recommend to anybody interested in journalism, defeating fascism, or preserving life on earth.

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