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Vicente Racioppi: The Local Preservationist and the National State

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Daryle Williams analyzes the life of a local citizen who fought to preserve the art, architecture, and history of one of Brazil's most beautiful colonial cities: Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais. Ouro Preto was at the center of what was probably the world's largest gold rush. During the eighteenth-century boom years, the town's inhabitants, including thousands of slaves, spent lavishly to create spectacular baroque-style architecture, sculpture, and art. Once the boom ended, however, the town suffered slow decline, becoming something of an economic and political backwater by the twentieth century. An unintended benefit of this decline was that, though they were poorly maintained, few of Ouro Preto's important colonial buildings were demolished. Dynamic urban centers like Rio and especially São Paulo emphasized modernization over preservation. Developers destroyed much of these growing cities' colonial architecture in the name of "progress," and what remained was largely wedged between commercial skyscrapers, factories, and apartment buildings that diminish the older structures' once opulent dominance of the cityscape. Ouro Preto, meanwhile, remained largely untouched, becoming a site of historical pilgrimages.

The story of Vicente Racioppi combines many themes that personify important trends in the Brazil of his day. Racioppi was the son of an Italian immigrant who made good, becoming a respected middle-class lawyer. Many respectable gentlemen at the turn of the century (like Adolpho Caminha and Candido Rondon featured in earlier chapters) professed a secular creed of positivism, and expressed anticlerical views critical of the Catholic Church. Racioppi, on the other hand, maintained a profound devotion to the Catholic Church. Racioppi's generation of republicans typically rejected the Iberian architecture of the colonial period in favor of the more fashionable modern styles popular in Europe, especially France. This symbolized the generation's rejection of Iberia as a model for their intellectual, artistic, political, and economic projects, instead they found their inspiration in more "modern" North Atlantic nations. After the cataclysmic violence of World War I, however, Racioppi joined other intellectuals and politicians in a reassessment of Brazilian history that began to valorize aspects of Brazil's colonial and early national heritage, including colonial art and architecture. An ascendant Catholic nationalism—part of the larger Catholic hierarchy's response to the challenges of an unfettered materialism celebrated by capitalists and denounced by communists as well as the growth of Protestant missionary work—became a powerful

force in Brazilian politics and society at the time, and Vicente was an independent player in this far from monolithic movement.

Racioppi is an excellent example of how individuals play key roles in shaping larger historical trends. The mineiro successfully brought to the attention of federal authorities the need to preserve Ouro Preto's unique historical heritage as a unique part of Brazil's national heritage. Racioppi's dilemma, as Daryle Williams shows, was that his very success ultimately undercut his ability to control the process of preservation in Ouro Preto. Preservation was a means of shaping and reflecting interpretations of national memory by defining and managing the sacred relics of Brazil's past. Locals interested in preservation, no matter how passionate, had to stare down a federal government who took on an increasingly interventionist role in public life after 1930. Preservation became an area of contention between various political, intellectual, and artistic movements and organizations at the local and the national level.

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Ouro Preto, a modestly-sized town whose contemporary economic life is largely organized around historical tourism, sits nestled in a winding mountain valley in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais. Every month, thousands of tourists trudge up and down the town's insanely steep cobblestone streets, alternatively sweating from the intense heat of day and shivering from the night's damp chill, to stop and to marvel at works of religious and civil architecture that date from the frenetic days of a spectacular eighteenth-century gold rush. The more adventuresome visitors descend into dank mine shafts, where local guides recount the terrible working conditions endured by slaves who produced a quantity of gold so large that the entire Portuguese empire knew of Vila Rica, or Rich Town, as Ouro Preto [literally: Black Gold] was originally known. The artistic and architectural heritage financed by the riches that remained in Ouro Preto is so exceptional that in 1984 the city's historic quarter won UNESCO's coveted designation of World Heritage.

The tourist to Ouro Preto will encounter small plaques indicating that the city's architectural treasures are protected by the Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (National Historical and Artistic Patrimony Institute, or IPHAN), Brazil's most important preservationist agency. Many of these plaques date from the late 1930s, when the Brazilian central state first made historical preservation a top priority. These plaques have a double-meaning. The first, and most self-evident, message points to the state's aggressive efforts to institute innovative preservationist projects during the authoritarian-nationalist regime known as the Estado Novo (1937-1945). The plaques are signposts to a heroic, nationalist campaign to save Brazil's cultural patrimony from oblivion. An alternative message points to a more uneasy politics of preservation, where the rescue of the past was an arena for intense conflict during a period of nationalist mobilization. In this second reading, our attention must be drawn to the sometimes amicable, sometimes tense relations between everyday citizens, regional authorities, and the central state over the right to manage the past. This essay concentrates on the second reading, where the seemingly apolitical designation of the "national historical and artistic patrimony" is a signpost to a varied cultural landscape where local preservationists and the central state struggled to give meaning to old buildings that was anything but dead.

The essay centers upon Vicente Racioppi, a cantankerous resident of Ouro Preto who embroiled himself in a series of confrontations with federal officials over the proper way to go about saving the town. Racioppi embraced the preservationist cause with an enthusiasm equal to that of the National Historical and Artistic Patrimony Service (the IPHAN's predecessor, then known by the acronym SPHAN), which coordinated a major restoration campaign between 1936 and the mid-1940s. Sharing a common belief the loss

of Ouro Preto's cultural heritage would be a loss for all Brazil, Racioppi and the SPHAN were divided about who should manage restoration efforts and how. Racioppi agitated for strong local participation; federal agents claimed that any city designated as national historical patrimony should be administered by agents of the national state. The disagreements between the local preservationist and federal officials escalated to a point where Racioppi would be forced from Ouro Preto and his personal effects mockingly paraded through the streets by rowdy students. Humiliated in a place he loved dearly, Racioppi resettled in Belo Horizonte, the state capital, where he remained a vocal defender of Ouro Preto's traditions well into old age. Ouro Preto, in the meantime, became a major tourist destination and a site of civic pilgrimages. Racioppi's marginalization from and by the "official" keepers of Ouro Preto's past is emblematic of a larger politics of state- and nation-making that characterizes modern Brazil.

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Racioppi's investment in the local traditions of Ouro Preto was not preordained. His father, Vital, was Italian. When the elder Racioppi made the transatlantic passage to Brazil, he could hardly imagine that he might raise an American-born son who dedicated his life to the impassioned defense of Brazilian history. It is more likely that Vital, like millions of other Italian immigrants who disembarked in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and New York in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, maintained hopes of one day returning to Italy after "making America." Yet like so many immigrants whose ideas of making America changed once they reached the New World, Vital Racioppi ended up

staying in Brazil, first establishing himself in Rio de Janeiro, and later making his way to Minas Gerais. There, Vital set aside hopes of earning a living as a violinist and married the daughter of a local records clerk. Together, Vital and his wife Affonsina established themselves as shopkeepers in Queluz [today's Conselheiro Lafayette] and started a family. Their son Vicente was born on 13 October 1886.

The details of Vicente's childhood are obscure, but we have clear evidence that Vital and Affonsina Racioppi succeeded in getting their son admitted to the well-regarded seminary in Mariana. There, the young Vicente studied Catholic theology, history, philosophy, and classical languages in preparation for a presumed career in the priesthood. But the priesthood did not suit the younger Racioppi, who set his sights on a career in law. By 1913, Vicente had moved to Belo Horizonte and earned a degree in juridical and social sciences. Surviving a near-fatal bout of typhoid fever, which left him gray-haired at age 20, Vicente went on to establish a small law practice, marry, and start a family.

Racioppi's formative years were exemplary of immigrant aspirations of provincial middle-class respectability. The choice to become a lawyer, rather than a priest, was emblematic of immigrant hopes for upwards social ascent under a young republican system. The distinction of having a liberal professional in its ranks afforded all Racioppis the right to claim a shared worldview with established and up-and-coming families in Minas. The income generated by Vicente's law practice provided wealth sufficient to emulate the domestic life of the regional bourgeoisie: the professional male provided for wife and children; neither wife nor children had to engage in work outside of the home. Religious piety was an equally important component of Racioppi's social

respectability, particularly in a region known for its Catholic devotion. A hybridized ethnic identification was yet another badge of honor, allowing the Racioppis the right to present themselves as Brazilians of European ancestry in a region where the cultural and ethnic legacy of chattel slavery made Africanity and miscegenation inescapable, but socially undervalued, parts of everyday life. Finally, Vicente was a proud *mineiro*. That is to say, his social identity was constructed around legal and cultural claims to being a citizen of Minas Gerais.

Late in life, Vicente praised his parents as people who "knew how to construct mineiro homes that were fundamentally Catholic and dignified by humility, hard work, circumspection, and honesty; [they made] blessed homes, where virtues reigned supreme and where domestic, spiritual, and civic beauty flourished." By all indications, Racioppi wanted nothing less for his own family.

Dividing his time between the demands of raising a large family—he and his wife had seven children—and his professional career, Vicente maintained a legal practice in Belo Horizonte and taught Latin, philosophy, and Catholic sociology at two local secondary schools. This dual career path as lawyer and educator were consistent with earlier experiences in the seminary and law school, as well as a commitment to the defense of the Catholic faith. Racioppi's early professional choices also reflected the opportunities for social and economic advancement for an educated, middle-class white male who chose to remain in Minas Gerais, rather than seek his fortune in more cosmopolitan cities like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

Of course, the decision to remain in Belo Horizonte did not necessarily condemn the Racioppis to a life of provincial obscurity. The state capital was a city of growing

importance, where economic and political decision-makers circulated in the same circles as the regional intelligentsia. Had Vicente wanted, he could have capitalized upon his educational and professional background to make a bid at joining the city's social elite. His chances for winning a position of influence in the state government were reasonably good, if we use the life histories of his contemporaries as a yardstick. If he had been especially close with the state republican party, he may have been able to land a job in Rio, where mineiro politicians cycled through the presidential palace with regularity. Racioppi, however, seemed little interested in the trappings of cosmopolitan culture. When the lawyer-educator relocated his family to Ouro Preto, the prospects of winning a position of state or national influence diminished greatly. Racioppi continued to maintain professional contacts in the capital, but the move to Ouro Preto put significant distance between his daily life and the "civilized" culture of wide boulevards, public tramways, industrial parks, cinemas, professional clubs, and consumer culture that were making Belo Horizonte into a modern city that is now Brazil's third largest.

If we consider Ouro Preto as Racioppi's antidote to modern "civilization" — a place where he could live and work within a urban setting that was Catholic, austere, and organically Brazilian—it is important to recognize that his disengagement with progress was never unilateral. Social status and material comfort remained dependent upon certain standards of modernity set in modern cities. So, Racioppi kept current his registry with the Brazilian Lawyers Association and the National Department of Professors, two important professional organizations headquartered in Rio. He was an active contributor to newspapers in Belo Horizonte, and occasionally published pieces in the Rio press. He participated in the state government, serving as secretary of the Council of Public

Instruction in Minas. He served on the Brazilian delegation to the Panamerican Institute of History and Geography, held in Buenos Aires in 1932. Thus, Racioppi carved out a niche in a public sphere that was indeed modern, modernizing, and national. Nevertheless, the colonial and local past became Racioppi's preferred home.

Racioppi's turn to the past coincided with the coming together of a loosely knit circle of intellectuals and politicians who feared that Brazil's historic heritage had been ravaged by the passage of time and a collective disinterest in the past. The physical decay of Ouro Preto, the colonial city which found itself in a long decline dating back to the first decade of the nineteenth century, was especially troubling to Brazil's would-be preservationists. In 1928, the members of the Brazilian Historical and Geographic Institute, the nation's most prominent historical academy, called upon the national governments to do something about the deterioration that threatened to despoil Ouro Preto's colonial treasures. These efforts paid off modestly when the federal government agreed to preserve a handful of building associated with the Inconfidência Mineira, the proto-republican conspiracy against colonial rule that originated in Ouro Preto in 1789. Racioppi became the local agent in this early preservationist campaign. In short time, he began to take a leading role in preservationist mobilization, joining calls for the federal government to confer some form of special status upon Ouro Preto. His efforts won the recognition and thanks of powerful figures in the national capital, including the Secretary of the Brazilian Historical and Geographic Institute, who credited Racioppi with leading the charge to save Ouro Preto.

On 12 July 1933, Chief of the Provisional Government Getúlio Vargas, a reformist politician from Rio Grande do Sul who swept into power in a brief civil war in

1930, issued an executive decree designating Ouro Preto as Brazil's first National Monument. Mineiro politicians were pleased to see that Vargas was open to extending formal federal protection to regional heritage. Racioppi must have been delighted to see how the regime change in 1930 appeared to open up new opportunities for local citizens living in the interior to cultivate a political engagement with national leaders even in the absence of democratic institutions.

High on the success of winning federal recognition of Ouro Preto's monumental status, Racioppi and his preservationist allies were still troubled by the town's sad state. The poverty of municipal coffers, compounded by the lack of federal monies for preservation, meant that preservation was really a moral campaign. Hopes for an increase in historical tourism were unrealized, in large part because the local tourist accommodations were primitive. This depressing state of affairs did not deter Racioppi from calling his adopted city a *National* Monument, where individual citizens and public officials throughout the country had the obligation to take corrective action.

In hopes of stirring up a more broad-based social mobilization around rescuing Ouro Preto from oblivion, Racioppi made regular appearances in the press. He also took up the cause of history writing, sketching out essays on local history and famous mineiros to be distributed through the primary school system. This historical scholarship was not especially substantive or innovative. It was, nevertheless, patriotic in its belief in the virtues of the celebrating the great feats and figures of regional and national history.

Racioppi also scoured Ouro Preto and surrounding towns in search of original documents, historical artifacts, and artwork tied to regional history. These efforts yielded some impressive finds, including papers signed by participants in the Inconfidência

Mineira, as well as works of history painting, religious art, and items of everyday use that dated from the colonial period. In time, his collection of regional art and artifacts came to rival similar collections held by the National Historical Museum, the Catholic Church, and wealthy collectors.

Racioppi's most notable achievement was the organization of a local historical academy, the Historical Institute of Ouro Preto (Instituto Histórico de Ouro Preto, or IHOP). Founded 29 August 1931, the Institute's mission statement, written by Racioppi in florid eighteenth-century prose, was to promote and defend local history. The motto of the IHOP was "He who does not love the past shall not trespass." A municipal decree recognized the institute as a "public utility" in August of the same year and Getúlio Vargas extended federal recognition in 1932, noting that Racioppi was serving "not only Ouro Preto, but all Brazil."

Perhaps most impressive aspect of Racioppi's accomplishments was his keen understanding that the success of local activism, at least in Ouro Preto, hinged upon a close and collaborative relationship between local and national actors. The financial resources of the IHOP were simply too scarce to make substantive gains without outside support. So, Racioppi secured presidential authorization to install the IHOP in a colonial era structure once belonging to *Inconfidente* (as the participants of the 1789 conspiracy were known) poet Tomás de Gonzaga. In thanks, Racioppi designated Vargas as a honorary member of the Institute, and often spoke of the president as a personal protector. He also relied upon outsiders to provide the IHOP with the social and cultural capital of intellectuals with greater national projection. The cofounders of the Historical Institute were Gastão Penalva and José Paulo Pires Brandão, two intellectuals of national

prominence who resided in Rio and enjoyed intimate contact with members of the national intelligentsia. Quickly figuring out that the success of his efforts hinged upon a successful appropriation of key of nationalistic discourse promoted by the Vargas state, Racioppi described all these efforts, not to mention the broader politics of historical preservation, in heroic and patriotic terms.

The highpoint of Racioppi's efforts came in July 1938, when the mineiro participated in a delegation to welcome Vargas, who had become president-dictator of the Estado Novo in November 1937. Vargas, who had studied in Ouro Preto as a youth, was in the colonial city to oversee the transfers of urns containing the remains of the Inconfidentes. An urn containing the remains of Tomás de Gonzaga, the Inconfidente who once resided in the structure ceded to the Historical Institute of Ouro Preto, was included in a ceremonial procession that described all Inconfidentes as national heroes.

During Vargas's two-day visit, Racioppi had the privilege of offering the president and other dignitaries a personal tour of the historical collection of artifacts that had been installed on the Historical Institute's ground floor. (In all likelihood, he kept quiet the fact that he also used the IHOP headquarters for his law offices and residence.) The privilege of greeting the president as an unpaid local preservationist, patriotic citizen, and member of the regional intelligentsia was, indeed, quite an accomplishment for a lawyer who had abandoned hopes of circulating among the powerful when he arrived in musty Ouro Preto. Racioppi was able to show Vargas how he was a dedicated defender of Ouro Preto's—the nation's—cultural riches. His unspoken agenda was to prove to Vargas that official calls to cultural renewal empowered everyday citizens to assert their place in national cultural mobilization, even in the context of a dictatorship. Vargas personally

thanked Racioppi for his efforts, and later went on to deliver a public speech thanking all mineiros, past and present for their contributions to the national cause.

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Racioppi experienced a fall from grace in the decade following Vargas's visit. He initially did not perceive that his success in early preservationist efforts would contribute to his undoing. In time, however, the combination of political missteps, rising federal interventionism into regional affairs, and changing rules in cultural nationalism pushed local figures like Racioppi to the margins of national preservationist campaigns.

The changing politics of the local and the national, particularly concerning questions of cultural patrimony, began in 1934, when Vargas approved the creation of the National Monuments Inspection Service. The Service concentrated its efforts in Ouro Preto, where Epamimondas Macedo, a graduate of city's School of Minas, undertook a survey of local historical structures. The results of the survey guided a modest restoration plan directed at a handful of churches, fountains, and bridges exhibiting signs of advanced physical decay. After contracting a small crew of local artisans and laborers, Macedo oversaw restoration work that lasted through the end of 1936. Racioppi, apparently bristling from the prospect that these federally-financed activities might result in more direct competition in determining how Ouro Preto might be restored, grumbled that the restoration work underway had been poorly executed.

By 1937, when the National Historical and Artistic Patrimony Service had taken over full responsibilities for federally-sponsored conservation in Ouro Preto, the tone and

volume of Racioppi's opposition to federal agents increased. In March, Racioppi appealed to the mayor, governor, and minister of education to take note of restoration work underway at the Church of São Francisco de Assis, one of the town's most spectacular, which he found to be misguided. The following year, he asserted that some of the urns containing the Inconfidentes's remains—icons of the Vargas' regime's campaign to rescue neglected and imperiled symbols of national culture—contained the bones of blacks mistakenly exhumed in Africa by misinformed federal agents.

The year that the Inconfidentes's remains were brought to Ouro Preto—1938—was clearly a good one for Racioppi. He received Vargas in what was essentially the parlor to his house. However, his criticisms towards official efforts to repatriate the Inconfidentes, in conjunction with an ever more intransigent opposition to the SPHAN, soured considerably his relationship with the more immediate representatives of the federal government in Ouro Preto.

Federally-sponsored restoration efforts continued apace after Vargas's visit. Much of the town's major monumental architecture was surveyed and registered as "national historical and artistic patrimony," a legal term codified by Decree-Law 25, issued 30 November 1937. The Inconfidentes's remains were installed in an austere pantheon which remains one of the most sacred civic spaces in Brazil. In 1944, a new federal museum, the Inconfidência Museum, opened to pay permanent homage to the heroic and creative age of the ill-fated conspiracy and its supreme hero, Joaquim José da Silva Xavier, better known as Tiradentes (literally: tooth-puller). By 1945, Ouro Preto had become the crown jewel in the SPHAN's collection of national cultural treasures. Federal publications promoted the architectural and artistic legacy of Brazil's Age of Gold to readers

throughout Brazil and abroad. The SPHAN contracted Manuel Bandeira, a well-known poet, to write a tourist guide to Ouro Preto. Federal funds also covered the costs of the construction of a major tourist hotel, the Grande Hotel de Ouro Preto, that was distinctive for its modern amenities as well as the uncompromisingly modernist design executed by the up-and-coming architect Oscar Niemeyer.

Federal approval for the Grande Hotel project vexed Racioppi, who believed adamantly that a historical city of Ouro Preto's caliber should not, could not, be contaminated by the modernist style, with its flat roofs, right angles, reinforced concrete walls, and large glass windows. In a letter written directly to Vargas, Racioppi described the new hotel as an abominable "coffin for a dead person" that would make a poor fit in the colonial city. Racioppi believed, like many of advocates of a revivalist style known as neocolonialism, that any new construction in Ouro Preto should harmonize with the town's existing eighteenth-century Luso-Brazilian architecture, marked by red-tile roofs, stone and adobe walls, and window screens. Any attempt to modernize the city had to take place within the symbolic language of the past. To do anything less would be to defile the nation's heritage. Racioppi quickly discovered that his traditionalist vision of architecture would not carry the day, especially when Niemeyer had the protection of powerful allies in the federal government. The Niemeyer project went forward over the protests of local and national preservationists who did not subscribe to the theory that modernist and eighteenth-century architecture might complement one another.

After railing against the Grande Hotel, Racioppi received a sharp rebuke from federal officials who were fed up with his very public charges of federal incompetence, overstepping, and high-handedness in local affairs. The rebuke came in response to the

demand that the SPHAN submit to an independent oversight committee. On 12 October 1940, SPHAN Director Rodrigo Melo Franco de Andrade, published an editorial in the widely-read Rio daily, the *Diário de Notícias*, to inform the paper's readership (and Racioppi, no doubt) that federal restoration projects would not be subject to citizens' oversight. The SPHAN's Advisory Council, according to Andrade, was the sole entity legally empowered to review decisions related to properties that had been designated as national historical patrimony. Since the entire historical core of Ouro Preto had been designated *en bloc* as historical patrimony in 1938, no private citizen—not even the residents of Ouro Preto—enjoyed the legal right to override decisions that had been determined to be appropriate by the Advisory Council. Like Racioppi, the SPHAN director was an ardent defender of the ideal that federally-sponsored historical preservation could *and should* be the basis for a strong, participatory social movement organized around ideas of the common good and love of country. What Andrade, a fellow mineiro, would not accept were Racioppi's continual efforts to undermine the work of federal agents charged with guiding this movement. Labeling Racioppi a local citizen who made himself a "gratuitous enemy" of the federal government, Andrade made Racioppi out to be *persona non grata* in the monumental city.

In the following half-decade, Racioppi jockeyed to maintain a voice in local preservationist projects. The results were mixed. On the one hand, he convinced the federal government to acquire 240 objects, taken from his collection of art and historical artifacts, for the permanent collection of the Inconfidência Museum. Racioppi was certainly proud to see that the fruits of his early preservationist efforts became a permanent part of the federal museum system and the national memory that it celebrated.

On the other hand, Racioppi was denied the post of museum director, which he sought, and he was effectively frozen out from all of the preparatory work that went into the installation of the museum exhibit. His exclusion from any restoration projects associated with the SPHAN was a foregone conclusion.

Most troubling was the rising level of federal scrutiny towards operational irregularities at the Historical Institute. Federal agents questioned why the private academy, which occupied federal property rent-free, was failing to fulfill key items in its mission statement. Racioppi's antagonism with federal preservationists, who considered him poorly qualified to offer any technical advice (not to mention a thorn in their side), as well as his lack of legitimacy among professional historians, further compromised his position. The single most glaring irregularity was the conditions under which Racioppi occupied the Casa de Gonzaga, as the Institute's headquarters were known. It was no secret that Racioppi had appropriated portions of the building for his law practice. The fact that the building's upper floor had been converted into a private residence flaunted the bounds of acceptability.

A president decree issued in 1944 authorized a commission of inquiry to determine whether the occupation of the Casa de Gonzaga was consistent with the concession granted in 1932. The commission found that the Institute was effectively defunct, that the historical structure was in disrepair, and that Institute's museum, which intermixed historical artifacts with personal items such as Racioppi's shoes, fell far short of rising standards in collection management. The commission indicated that Racioppi had to return the building to federal hands or begin to pay rent. Racioppi reportedly responded with a demand to be compensated for structural improvements made at his

expense. When the property title was transferred to the School of Mines, a local institution desperate for new facilities, Racioppi remained put.

The next four years would be extremely rough for Racioppi, who faced continual federal pressure to vacate the Casa de Gonzaga. He hunkered down, invoking the protections originally offered by Vargas. The bloodless military coup of 29 October 1945, which ousted Vargas and ended the Estado Novo, afforded a brief respite, as national and local political arrangements were restructured to conform to the ideal that Brazil's participation in the Allied defeat of Nazism meant the dismantling of authoritarian structures and practices. The expropriation of property without a proper warrant might seem anti-democratic.

Racioppi was still in a predicament. He had lost his biggest patron, Getúlio Vargas, who was sent into internal exile before returning to the national scene as a federal senator who had diminished influence in areas like historical preservation. In defending his position without Vargas (whose actual interest in the IHOP was dubious), Racioppi was forced to invoke the language of patriotic self-sacrifice and defense of national traditions that had won him a place in early federal preservationists efforts. The dilemma centered on the fact that Racioppi's opponents at the SPHAN had wholly appropriated this language as their own. The nationalization of the politics of preservation, which Racioppi help set in motion at the local level, had basically excluded local dissent in language and most certainly in the allocation of decision-making powers.

Racioppi's tragicomic downfall came unexpectedly in late August 1948, while he was away from Ouro Preto attending the burial of his son, a decorated veteran of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force who had fought alongside American troops in Italy during

World War II. On the night of the August 25—four days shy the Historical Institute's seventeenth anniversary—thirty-four students enrolled at the School of Mines, with the aid of the mayor of Ouro Preto's secretary and a local carpenter, used a crowbar to break into the Casa de Gonzaga. Racioppi soon discovered that the invaders had set up camp in his home, turning it into a *república* [republic], as the city's group houses for students are known. To add insult to injury, the rowdy students altered the plaque at the entrance to the building, which originally read "Here lived Thomaz Antonio Gonzaga 1784-1788," by affixing a hand-written addendum "who at least paid the rent."

Racioppi immediately called for a police inquiry, but he received little assistance. He also began a letter-writing campaign in the Minas press, in which he attributed the invasion to an executive order approved by president Eurico Dutra that improperly ceded the building to the School of Mines. Dutra, who was advised by the SPHAN on matters relating to historical patrimony, expressed no interest in reviewing Racioppi's cause.

Facing indifference in the federal capital and ridicule at the local level, Racioppi called upon his fellow Brazilians' sense of democratic principles. In a letter published in the Belo Horizonte daily *O Diário*, Racioppi called upon "the men of government, honorable and patriotic, who act under the mantle of the Federal Constitution, to do justice by respecting liberty and the fundamental rights of all those who live in a democratic regime." The invocation of notions of democracy illustrate how desperately Racioppi wanted to find a language to describe how he had been done an injustice. What was originally an argument based upon an affront to the patriotic citizen whose work had been recognized by no one less than Getúlio Vargas shifted to language about the violation of property rights. In another instance, Racioppi described the occupation of the

Casa de Gonzaga as "communistic barbarism," pandering to the rising tide of anti-communism that was putting Cold War limits on the nature of democracy in the Americas. These rhetorical acrobatics yielded little. Nor did any attempts to win sympathy for the injustice of an attack upon the grieving father of a decorated war hero. The Racioppis reluctantly took up residence in Belo Horizonte, where Vicente prepared a lawsuit to win, at a minimum, the return of his personal belongings that remained locked up in the Casa de Gonzaga.

For a brief moment in 1949, the lawsuit appeared to work. *Cruzeiro*, the most influential newsweekly read by Brazil's growing urban middle classes, devoted a feature story to Racioppi's plight. Unfortunately, the article cast an unflattering light on his long history of conflicts with municipal and federal officials. Racioppi came off as an ill-tempered eccentric rather than a everyday patriot who had been wronged by big government and local politics. The case received some positive press in Belo Horizonte, but in the end, Vicente and his wife had to content themselves with the restitution of their belongings, which university students paraded through the streets of Ouro Preto in a carnivalesque slap to the scorned historian, and the prospects of a new life in the state capital.

In June 1951, Racioppi once again turned to Vargas, who had returned to the presidential palace as the constitutionally-elected president. This was a cry for help from an old friend and an act of desperation. But Vargas, who had offered some kind words to Racioppi when he signed the authorization for the Historical Institute to occupy the Casa de Gonzaga in 1932, demonstrated no interest in the plight of the Institute or its beleaguered director. Vargas' dramatic death-by-suicide in August 1954 ended all hopes

that somehow, someday Vargas might see personally to the restoration of Racioppi's honor.

For the remainder of his life, Racioppi busied himself with the project of rebuilding the legitimacy lost in 1948. He proceeded without the support of the president nor any other federal official. He did manage to organize a new historical museum, again in his home, in a quiet neighborhood of Belo Horizonte. The new museum contained items related to the Inconfidência Mineira, as well as the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, sacred art, and historical artifacts. The bitterness remained, however. In 1952, Racioppi told one reporter who visited his new home that the "republic" established in the usurped Casa de Gonzaga was far from the republic dreamed up by the Inconfidentes in 1789.

In 1958, he published the first volume in a self-named series of books "on a variety of themes, studies, and items of interest relating to the religious art, tradition, and civilization of Minas Gerais." The series had limited distribution and remained incomplete. A decade later, he complained that the Inconfidência Museum had failed to properly display all the objects that he "ceded" in 1944. Museum director Orlandino Seitas Fernandes issued a report that the objects in question had been sold, not ceded. Fernandes dismissed Racioppi's curatorial criticisms.

Racioppi's last known publication, a collection of brief essays about historical themes related to Minas Gerais, appeared in 1970. Published to commemorate the thirty-ninth anniversary of the foundation of the IHOP, Racioppi dedicated the book to his family, a handful of mineiro politicians, the cofounders of the IHOP, and Vargas. The book includes a profile of Holy Week processions in his beloved Ouro Preto. Racioppi must have been terribly disappointed to see that Ouro Preto had become one of Brazil's

most important tourist destinations and the object of tremendous interest by historians and art critics, while he remained on the sidelines.

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Aside from the brief mention of the acquisition of portions of his art and artifact collection for the Inconfidência Museum, Vicente Racioppi has been wholly expunged from official memories of the restoration of Ouro Preto. The two most important federal institutions that manage Ouro Preto's magnificent historical and artistic treasures, the IPHAN and the Inconfidência Museum, tell their institutional memories without crediting the influence of this local citizen who shared, at least in his emotion, the same commitment to celebrating Ouro Preto as they. The few locals that figure prominently in these national narratives are historical figures associated with Ouro Preto's past and federal employees. Any outsider who visits one of Brazil's premier World Heritage site would have no idea of the dramatic and comic history of the Casa de Gonzaga.

Much of silences surrounding Racioppi were of his own making. He was ill-tempered and arrogant. His allegations of federal incompetence were poorly substantiated. His efforts to curry favor with powerful figures, especially Vargas, were crass. His misappropriation of public property was ill-advised. Vicente Racioppi conquered by his own hand a place in the history of conservation of Ouro Preto—a place located far from the celebratory history which tells us how it was that Brazil and the world came to share Ouro Preto.

There are, of course, other narratives to be told surrounding Racioppi's near disappearance from the historical record. The most important of which is the narrative of an everyday citizen, who lived very much in a local place, and his relationship to an expanding, interventionist, and often authoritarian state. The language of cultural nationalism, the celebration of the national past, the call to patriotic collective action united local citizen and central state in a common cause. But the terms of this association were not egalitarian. The politics of preservation empowered different national actors differently and unequally. The recovery of the history of this process—which gives us wonderful eighteenth-century vistas and unsettling historical erasures—helps us see the dynamic and contested nature of nationalism and its cultural artifacts in modern Brazil.

Further Reading

Racioppi's writings are not easy to come by, and none have been translated into English. The principal source materials consulted for this chapter were found in the institutional archives of Racioppi's adversaries. Publications about Minas Gerais, from the colonial period through the Vargas era, are more readily available. See C. R. Boxer, *The Golden Age of Brazil, 1695-1750* (1962); Kenneth Maxwell, *Conflicts and Conspiracies: Brazil and Portugal, 1750-1808* (1973); Helena Morley, *The Diary of Helena Morley* (1957); and John D. Wirth, *Minas Gerais in the Brazilian Federation, 1889-1937* (1977). For more reading on the complex relationships between Getúlio Vargas and everyday Brazilians, see Robert M. Levine, *Father of the Poor? Vargas and His Era* (1998) and R. S Rose, *One of the Forgotten Things: Getúlio Vargas and Brazilian Social Control, 1930-1954* (2000). The Brazilian Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional

maintains a website about Ouro Preto at
<<http://www.iphan.gov.br/bens/Mundial/p2.htm>>. Travel guides will provide additional
information on this World Heritage Site.