
Sampaio, Teodoro Fernandes

(1855–1937), engineer, geographer, writer, cartographer, architect, ethnographer, and historian,
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was born on 7 January 1855 in Santo Amaro da Purificação, Bahia, Brazil. His mother, Domingas da Paixao do Carmo, was enslaved, and it is believed his father was her master. Although he was born to an enslaved mother, Sampaio lived his life a free man. It is generally thought that his father granted him freedom at birth or shortly thereafter.

Sampaio lived through some of Brazil's greatest historical transformations: from a slave society to industrial capitalism, and from the imperial era to the Vargas nation-state. He not only lived through these transformations, however, but also was at the heart of many of them—including designing and overseeing the creation of railroads, mapping and surveying the contours and boundaries of the nation, designing urban sanitation systems, and founding many of Brazil's first historical and geographical institutions. Sampaio also anticipated many of the great social problems that Brazil would face throughout the twentieth century. His engineering and geographical studies focused on the creation of economic opportunities and social integration. Through his research and writings, Sampaio attempted to give voice to the poor and marginalized people of Brazil's interior and to Brazil's indigenous communities. His geographical, ethnographic, and historical writings emphasized the importance of indigenous knowledge and culture in the formation of the Brazilian nation. He is particularly known for his work on the explorers and settlers of São Paulo known as *bandeirantes*, the Chapada Diamantina region of the state of Bahia, and the Tupi Indians.

At the age of 9 in 1864—the first year of Brazil's war with Paraguay—Sampaio moved from Bahia to São Paulo, and then to Rio de Janeiro, where he studied engineering at the elite Escola Politécnica do Rio de Janeiro. During his studies he also lectured on engineering and worked as an architectural draftsman for the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro. Upon completing his engineering degree in 1877, he returned to his birth place in Bahia.

Between the years 1878 and 1884, Sampaio purchased the freedom of his three brothers who were enslaved. In Brazil in 1871 the Rio Branco law granted freedom to all children born of slave parents and began what is often referred to as the process of gradual abolition in Brazil. Slavery was ultimately abolished in Brazil in 1888 through what is known as the *Lei Áurea* (Golden Law) signed by Princess Isabel. Interestingly, although Sampaio was an advocate for the causes of abolition and modernization in Brazil, he was also a strong supporter of the Brazilian monarchy through most of his life.

Sampaio was a pioneer in the fields of engineering and national infrastructure development in Brazil. In 1879 he was named as a member of the prestigious Comissão Hidráulica do Império. The commission was under the leadership of the American William Milnor Roberts, who, among other things, had been the chief engineer for the Northern Pacific Railroad. The commission also included

the American geologist Orville A. Derby. Sampaio developed a close and lasting relationship with Derby, and they continued to work together for many years to come. The aim of the 1879 commission was the expansion of the port of Santos, along with the exploration and navigation of the São Francisco River and its tributaries. The goal of this work was, in part, to support the creation of industry in the interior by connecting it to the ports of Rio, Bahia, and Pernambuco via railways that would follow the river valleys. As part of the commission, Sampaio specifically oversaw the construction of the railway between Salvador da Bahia and São Francisco.

Toward the end of the São Francisco expedition, Roberts invited Sampaio to trek through the Chapada Diamantina region and the sertões of Bahia. These travels, together with the São Francisco expedition, were the basis of Sampaio's first two major publications, *O tupi na geografia nacional* (1901) and *O rio São Francisco e a Chapada Diamantina* (1905). Both works are still considered among the most important studies of the geography and culture of the interior of Brazil. Significantly, Sampaio's writings during the project recorded not only the physical and geological characteristics of the interior, but also the immense poverty and hardship faced by the people living there. He shared many of his notes and hand-drawn maps of the interior of Bahia, in particular the town of Canudos, with Euclides da Cunha while da Cunha was covering the battle in Canudos and writing his masterpiece *Os sertões*. It has been suggested by some scholars that Sampaio thought of the title *Os sertões*.

In 1886, upon the completion of his work with Roberts in Bahia, Sampaio was invited by Orville Derby to join the Comissão Geográfica e Geológica (CGG) of São Paulo. Sampaio accepted and became the commission's chief engineer, leading the first expedition into the Paranapanema river valley. He would continue to work with the commission on a number of sanitation and transport projects until 1890. He viewed such projects as integral to the creation of a modern society, and as an important step toward social equality.

In 1894 Sampaio helped found the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico de São Paulo. In 1898 he was named the director and chief engineer of sanitation in the state of São Paulo, and as an inspector for the Canadian-owned São Paulo Tramway Light and Power Company. He served in these roles until 1903, at which point he returned again to Bahia to work on urban sanitation and engineering projects. While in Bahia at this time he became a city council member and helped found the Instituto Geográfico e Histórico da Bahia. In addition to founding these research institutions, Sampaio continued to publish and lecture regularly throughout the beginning of the twentieth century. Much of his later work, such as the *Dicionário histórico, geográfico e etnográfico do Brasil* (1922), focused on historical and cultural aspects of Bahia and São Paulo. In 1912 he presided over the Fifth Congress of Brazilian Geography, and in 1922 he served as the president of the Instituto Geográfico e Histórico da Bahia.

Sampaio died on 11 October 1937 in Rio de Janeiro. There are two towns named after him in Brazil, one in the state of Bahia and another in the state of São Paulo, and a major road in the city of São Paulo is named after him.

Sampaio's experiences and achievements would be remarkable for any person from any walk of life, but they are particularly impressive when one considers he was born to an enslaved mother in a society deeply structured by racism and oligarchic power. Sampaio dedicated his life to the development of public institutions and public health. His work as a geographer, historian, cartographer, writer, and engineer exemplifies the values of progressivism. His engineering and infrastructure accomplishments, and the knowledge he produced regarding the history and geography

of Brazil's interior, are unparalleled. Although there is relatively little written on the life and work of Sampaio, especially considering his accomplishments and their impact on Brazilian society, he is undeniably one of Brazil's great historical actors and thinkers.

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